Venus Versus Virus 7

Seven Seas

The End is Nigh!

After Sumire Takahana discovered she was gifted with the ability to see malevolent entities known as "Viruses," she joined the monster-killing outfit Venus Vangard and her life has never been the same since. It's been one battle after another against stronger and stranger foes. Now, the ultimate showdown between the crew of Venus Vangard and their mysterious enemy has come. Will Sumire's feelings for her boyfriend Yoshiki survive the terrible discovery she's about to make?

The penultimate volume in the exciting *Venus Versus Virus* manga series!

OLDER TEEN (16+)
$10.99 USA
($13.99 CAN)
ISBN 978-1-934876-63-3
51099>
9 781934 876633

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Seven Seas

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Venus versus Virus

ヴィーナス ヴァーサス ヴァイアラス

VOLUME 7

story & art by Atsushi Suzumi

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VENUS VERSUS VIRUS VOL. 7
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First published in 2008 by Media Works Inc., Tokyo, Japan.
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ISBN: 978-1-934876-63-3

Printed in Canada

First printing: October 2009

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

NOW THERE'S A GOOD GIRL...
TAKE A DEEP BREATH.
GOOD.
LET US GO DOWN-STAIRS.
...
TAP
TAP
.....?

Piece 28
GRIEF. EXCUSES.

JOLT
SUMIRE?
AHH ...!
O-OH, UH, YEAH?!
WHAT'RE YOU DOING?
SHEESH, WERE YOU SPACED OUT AGAIN?
GAWD
?
DID YOU SEE SOME-THING...
WRITTEN ON THAT PIECE OF PAPER?
N-NO!
N-NOTHING! NOTHING AT ALL! I DIDN'T SEE ANY-THING!!
OKAY...
OH!
SHUFFLE

I'M SCARED ...!
I...
.....
LOLA-CHAN, WHAT'S WRONG...?
I DON'T WANNA BE ALL ALONE!
I'M SCARED, AND I WANT MY SISTER AND MY GRANDPA BACK!
I HATE THIS!
.....!
SNIFFLE
AND FROM GRANDPA TOO!
I'VE NEVER BEEN ALL BY MYSELF LIKE THIS BEFORE...
I'M TOTALLY CUT OFF FROM LAYLA...
SNIFFLE
SO WHY DON'T YOU LEAVE?
HMPH!

GO HOME. GO RUN BACK TO YOUR GRAND-FATHER'S PLACE.
.....
IF YOU WANT TO STAY OUT OF DANGER, THAT'S THE ONLY CHOICE YOU'VE GOT.
WELL ...?
?!
WHAT?! LUCIA-SAN!
NO MATTER WHERE YOU TRY TO HIDE NOW...
AND IF YOU GO...
JUST REMEMBER THIS...
YOU WILL ALWAYS BE ALONE.
!!
I...
I HATE YOU!!
.....

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
MY... NOW THAT WAS SOMETHING I NEVER EXPECTED TO HEAR YOU SAY.
BUT, UH...
I'M NOT SURE WHY THAT IRRITATED ME SO MUCH.
I DON'T KNOW.
GIVE HER A LITTLE TIME, AND SHE'LL TURN AROUND ON HER OWN.
.....
SIGH...
LOLA-CHAN...
LET HER BE, SUMIRE.
BUT ...
I BELIEVE SOME SMALL PART OF YOU...
WANTED TO SAY THE SAME WORDS YOU HAD FOR LOLA TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF.
WHAT, ARE YOU SAYING I'M LIKE A LITTLE KID...?
GRR!
I WOULD SUSPECT YOU SAW A LITTLE OF YOURSELF IN HER AND DID NOT LIKE IT.
HEH HEH
WHAT I MEAN IS...
YES, THEY ARE VERY MUCH ALIKE.
HEH HEH HEH
HM...?
SOMETIMES, I REALLY HATE YOU, NAHASHI.
BLUSH
.....
UGH ...

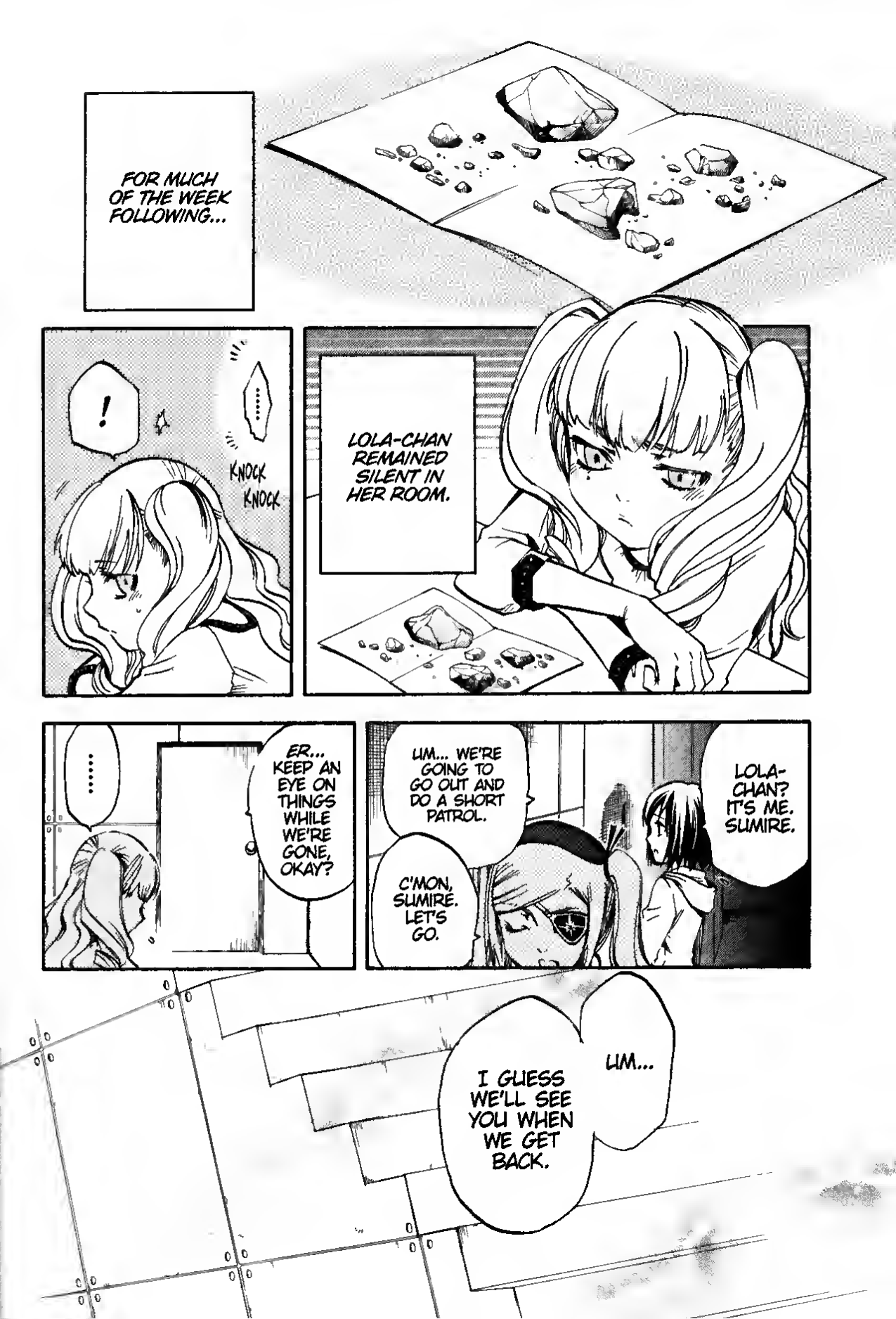
AH!
TWITCH
SUMIRE-KUN?
I-I'M SORRY.
I JUST CAN'T SEEM TO STOP THINKING ABOUT THAT LETTER...
THE LETTER? AH, YES. THAT REMINDS ME...
I HAVE SOMETHING I WOULD LIKE TO ASCERTAIN.
THE BOTH OF YOU, PLEASE WAIT HERE FOR A MOMENT.
SEPTEM-BER...
SIXTH...?
BUT THAT'S...

IS THAT THE "NIGHT" IT WAS TALKING ABOUT?!
MOST LIKELY... YES.
THE "NIGHT"...
THE ONE THAT WAS MENTIONED IN THE WEIRD WRITING THAT LUCIA-SAN'S POWERS SHOWED ON THE LETTER...
"ON THE NIGHT WHEN STARS FALL FROM THE DAWN STAR...
THE SLUMBERING GATE SHALL BE AWOKEN BY THE KEY...
GUIDING ME TO THE WORLD THAT SHALL BE MINE."
BY "DAWN STAR," IT IS MOST LIKELY REFERENCING THE PLANET VENUS. THE NEXT TIME A METEOR SHOWER WILL BE VISIBLE, COMING FROM VENUS'S POSITION IN THE SKY...
IS SEPTEMBER FIFTH.
THE SHOWER WILL BE AT IT'S MOST ACTIVE LATE AT NIGHT ON THE FIFTH AND INTO THE EARLY MORNING ON THE SIXTH.
THE DAY MOTHER DIED!
MY BIRTHDAY ...!

VENUS, HUH?
THAT'S THE STAR FOR THE PRINCE OF THE MORNING, THE ONE ANGEL WHO DARED TO LEAD A REBELLION AGAINST GOD. LUCIFER.
BOTH "LUCIA" AND "LUCIF" COME FROM THAT NAME.
THIS IS ALL TOO NEAT... TOO SIMPLE.
IT'S STARTING TO TICK ME OFF.
GRIND
SO THEN...
THE LETTER IS SAYING THAT THE "GATE" AND THE "KEY"... LUCIA-SAN AND ME...
WE ARE GOING TO USE OUR POWERS TO GUIDE THIS "AION" PERSON TO THAT "TRUE WORLD" PLACE.
IS THAT RIGHT?
.....
YES. IT SEEMS THAT LETTER...
WAS AN ANNOUNCE-MENT, NOT A WARNING.
.....
GULP
HMPH...

LUCIA-SAN...?
IT'S TRUE, SUMIRE.
THIS IS THE PERFECT OPPORTU-NITY.
IF HE WANTS US TO COME TO HIM, THEN LET'S GO.
ONCE IT'S ALL OVER AND DONE...
WE'LL HAVE A BIG PARTY.
IF WE FIND THIS "AION" GUY...
I MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET SOME CLUES ABOUT WHO HURT MOTHER.
THEN...

IT IS YOUR BIRTHDAY, AFTER ALL.
GIVES US SOMETHING TO SHOOT FOR.
.....
PLIP
AH...
LUCIA-SAAAAN!!
WAAAAAAAH!!
?!
WHA?! W-WAIT, WHOA! WHAT'RE YOU CRYING FOR?!
YAMMER YAMMER
HNH
GOOD-NESS...
IT HAS CERTAINLY BECOME QUITE LIVELY AROUND HERE.
BUT DESPITE THEIR CHEER...


FOR MUCH OF THE WEEK FOLLOWING...
!
.....
KNOCK KNOCK
LOLA-CHAN REMAINED SILENT IN HER ROOM.
.....
ER... KEEP AN EYE ON THINGS WHILE WE'RE GONE, OKAY?
UM... WE'RE GOING TO GO OUT AND DO A SHORT PATROL.
C'MON, SUMIRE. LET'S GO.
LOLA-CHAN? IT'S ME. SUMIRE.
UM...
I GUESS WE'LL SEE YOU WHEN WE GET BACK.

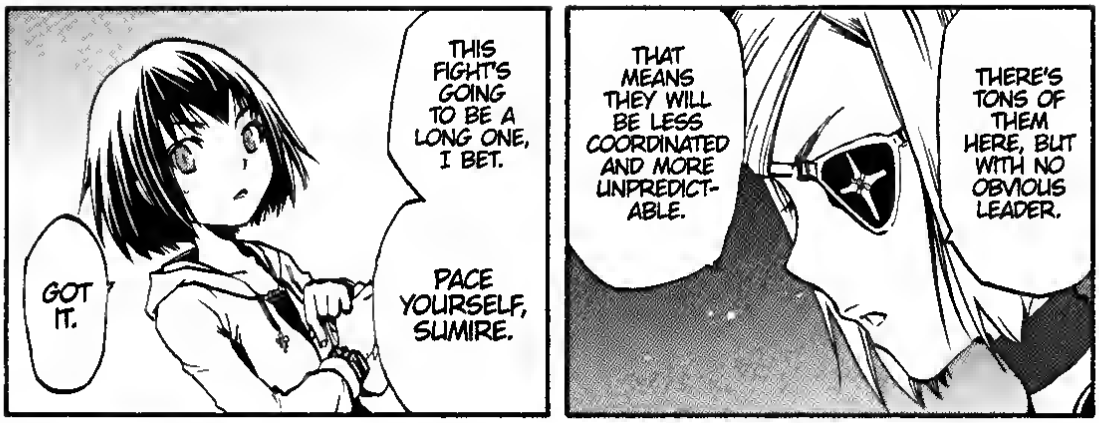
TAP
.....
SKSHSKSHSKSH
PAIN

CHK
BLAM!
FLASH
PURE, CLEAR WATER, HEED MY COMMAND. MELD WITH THE EARTH...
SKSH

AND GIVE TO ME YOUR POWER!
GYAAA
RMBL
RMBL
RMBL
!!
KYAA!!
FWOOOOSH
YES! I DID IT! IT ACTUALLY WORKED!!
HUH?!
WHA?!
LOLA-CHAN ...?!

NH ...!
FINISH
IF YOU'RE NOT HERE TO HELP AND FIGHT, STAY OUT OF OUR WAY.
WHRL
!
LUCIA ...
I... LIM...
THMP
.....
GRR!
HEY!
WHEW
.....
SIGH

SMILE
WAIT RIGHT HERE, LOLA-CHAN. WE'LL BE DONE IN A MINUTE.
I CAN STILL SMELL THEM AROUND.
LET'S GO, SUMIRE. WE'RE GOING TO WIPE OUT EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM.
RIGHT!
W-WAIT...!
BANG
YOU... YOU WERE RIGHT.
I WAS SCARED...
I DON'T LIKE BEING SCARED.
I REALLY HATE IT...
WILL SHE BE ALL RIGHT...?
QUIT WORRYING ABOUT HER AND FOCUS ALREADY.

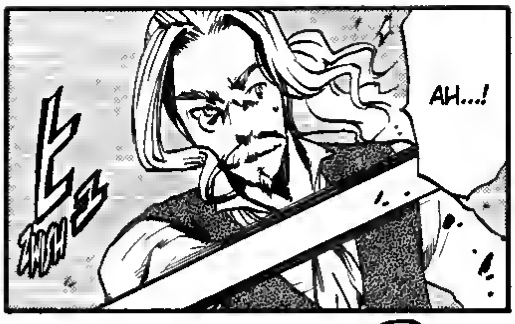

THIS FIGHT'S GOING TO BE A LONG ONE, I BET.
PACE YOURSELF, SUMIRE.
GOT IT.
THERE'S TONS OF THEM HERE, BUT WITH NO OBVIOUS LEADER.
THAT MEANS THEY WILL BE LESS COORDINATED AND MORE UNPREDICT-ABLE.

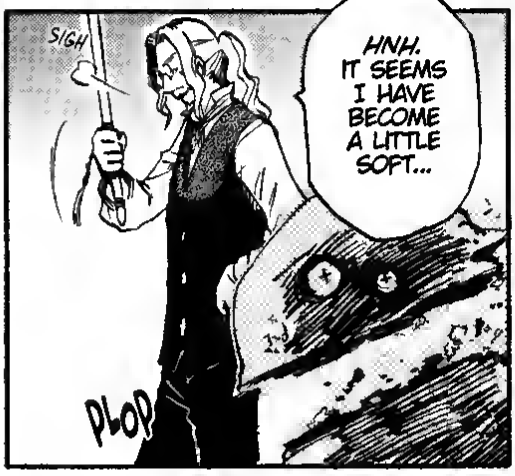
HERE THEY COME...
FSK
ZURO

WHISPER
MOTHER...
LEND ME YOUR STRENGTH.

FIRE, HEAR MY WORDS.
SWAA

GYAAAAAA!!
IGNITE !!
WHOOSH
.....
WELL DONE.
LUCIA.
YOU ALWAYS DID FIND WAYS TO GROW AND LEARN WHILE I WAS NOT THERE TO WATCH.
TO BE HONEST...
I WAS MORE THAN A LITTLE FRIGHTENED BY THE PROSPECT OF TEACHING YOU.
ALMOST AS IF...
THE VERY SPIRIT OF FIRE, THE SALAMANDER, WERE COMPLETELY AT HER BECK AND CALL.


AH...!


SIGH
HNH. IT SEEMS I HAVE BECOME A LITTLE SOFT...
PLOP

ACK!
ZZZZ

I HAD A FEELING THAT...!
THE MORE YOUR POWERS GREW, THE MORE YOU MIGHT DRIFT AWAY FROM ME...

TALK ABOUT LUCKY!

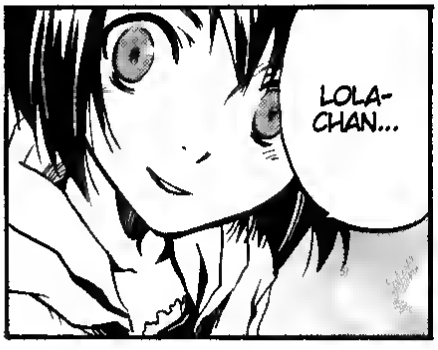
SHEESH! SO THIS IS WHAT SHE CALLS "PACING YOURSELF"?
THAT LOOKS MORE LIKE GOING ALL OUT!
SHIR

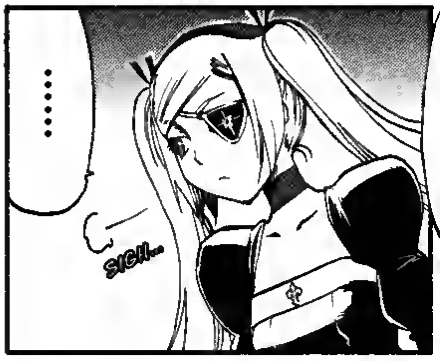
YOSHIKI-SAN?
?!

WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!
THAT'S A VIRUS!
SUMIRE?!
WAIT !!
WHR
HE'S NOT A VIRUS! THIS IS...
SHF
HUH...?
NO...!
LUCIA-SAN...! LOLA-CHAN...!

!
BOFF
THUD
I STILL HATE BEING SCARED AND ALL.
BUT NOW I KNOW BETTER. BEING SCARED SUCKS...
THERE'S NO CHOICE, REALLY.

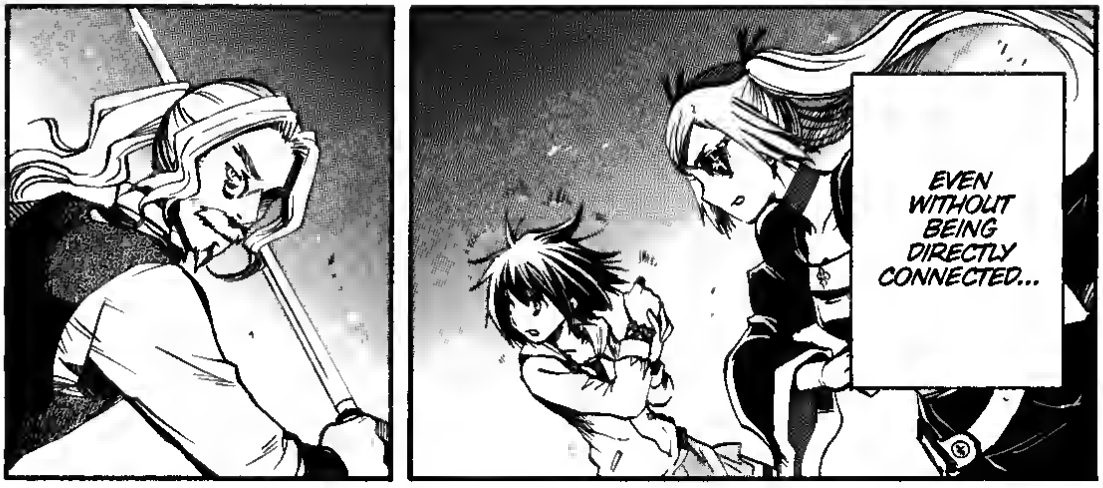
BUT BEING STUCK ALL ALONE...
FSHHHH
SUCKS WAY MORE!

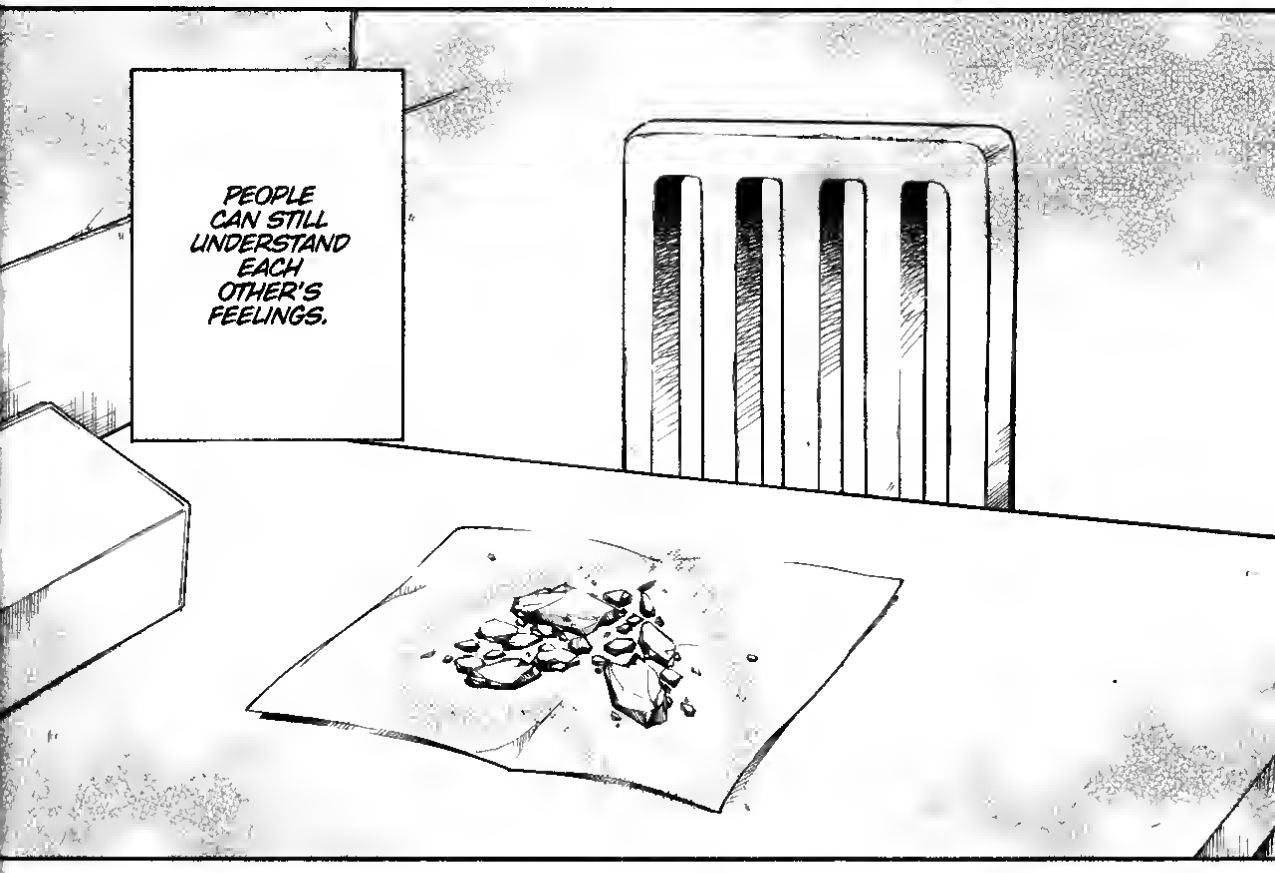

LOLA-CHAN...


.....
SIGH...

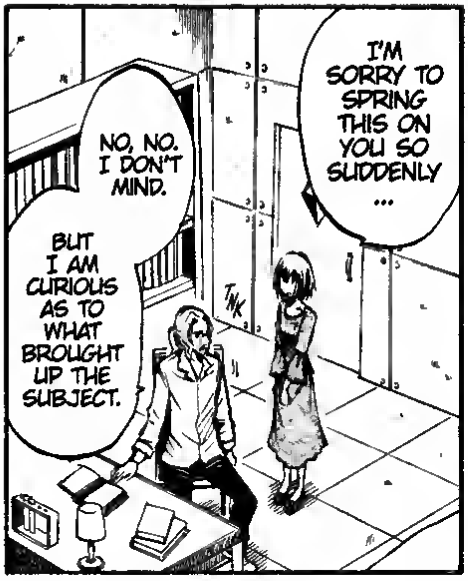
IF I LOST YOU AND LUCIA, AND NAHASHI-OJISAMA, ON TOP OF EVERYTHING ELSE...
I'D NEVER FORGIVE IT! EVER!
GOT IT?! YOU GUYS AREN'T EVER ALLOWED TO VANISH ON ME, EVER!!

"I'M SORRY."
URK
.....
I'M WAITING...
YOU CAN GET OFF YOUR HIGH HORSE NOW, KID.
FLICK
OW!
LUCIA-SAN...!
HEY, GRANDPA ?
I'M SORRY, LOLA.
AHEM
I SAID SOME THINGS I SHOULDN'T HAVE AS WELL.
I THINK...
I MIGHT'VE JUST DISCOVERED SOMETHING INCREDIBLE.
YEAH!
WHAT DO YOU SAY WE GIVE THEM OUR BEST SERVICE, HM?
WE HAVE "PEOPLE" JUST DYING FOR OUR ATTENTION.
RIGHT. NOW THAT THAT'S DONE...
SLORP


EVEN WITHOUT BEING DIRECTLY CONNECTED...

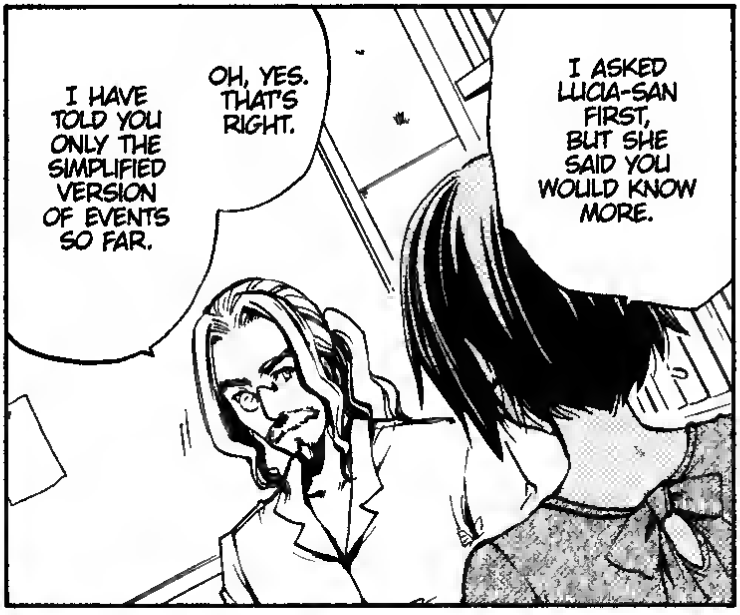

PEOPLE CAN STILL UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S FEELINGS.

ANYWAY...
WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING BACK THERE?
HUH?
IT, UM, KINDA LOOKED A LITTLE LIKE SOMEONE I KNEW...
UM... WELL... UH...
SQUIRM
FIDGET
NEVER MIND. IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER.
EVERY-THING TURNED OUT RIGHT IN THE END.
KREESH
WHEN YOU JUMPED IN FRONT OF THAT VIRUS, I THOUGHT YOU'D GONE NUTS.
YOU KNOW.
URK ...!
.....
AND YOU KEEP ACTING MORE LIKE A MOTHER.
IT LOOKS LIKE A CERTAIN SOMEBODY FINALLY FOUND WHERE SHE'D MISPLACED HER COURAGE...


I'M SORRY TO SPRING THIS ON YOU SO SUDDENLY ...
NO, NO. I DON'T MIND.
BUT I AM CURIOUS AS TO WHAT BROUGHT UP THE SUBJECT.
TINK

YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT LILITH...?

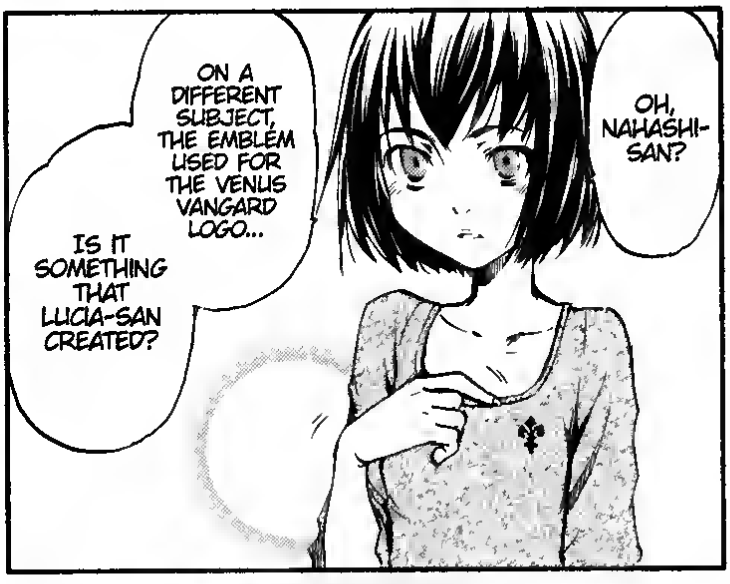
I KNOW IT'S PROBABLY NOT A VERY POLITE THING TO ASK...
BUT I NEED TO KNOW.

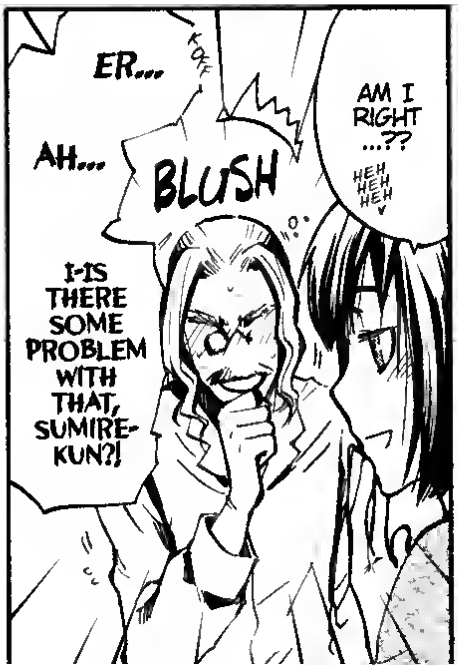

I ASKED LUCIA-SAN FIRST, BUT SHE SAID YOU WOULD KNOW MORE.
OH, YES. THAT'S RIGHT.
I HAVE TOLD YOU ONLY THE SIMPLIFIED VERSION OF EVENTS SO FAR.

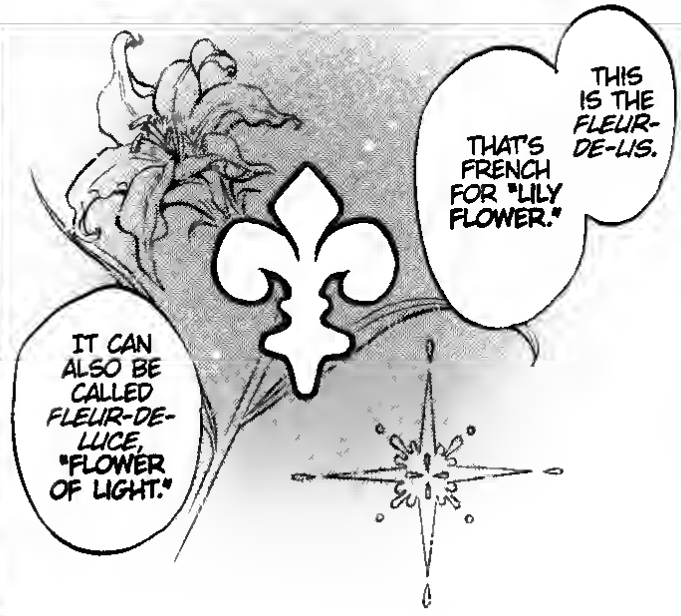
I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ONLY OTHER PERSON WHO HAD POWERS LIKE MINE.

DING
MUCH LIKE THE LILY FROM WHICH HER NAME IS DERIVED.
SHE WAS A KIND, DIGNIFIED AND VERY STRONG WOMAN.
I SEE.
UNTIL HER DYING DAY...

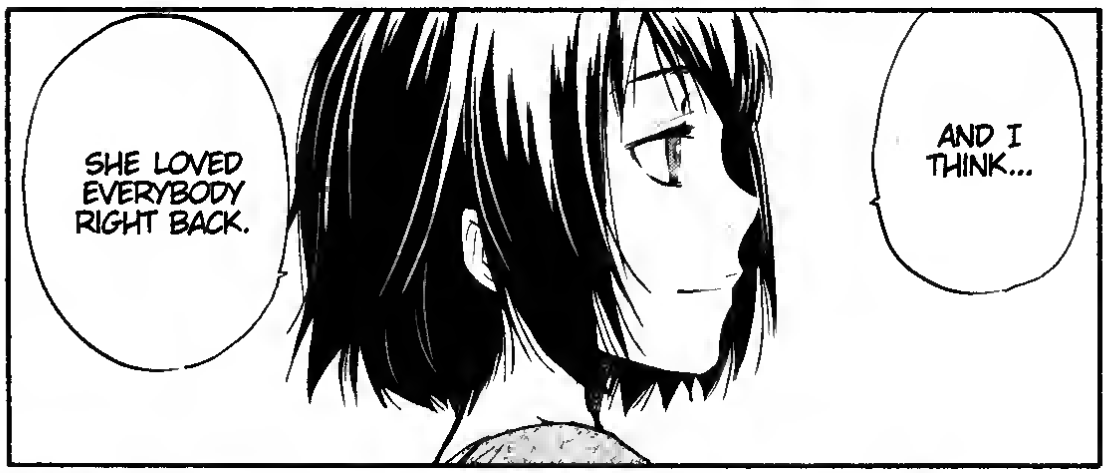
??
NO, IT WAS MY IDEA.
I KNEW IT!

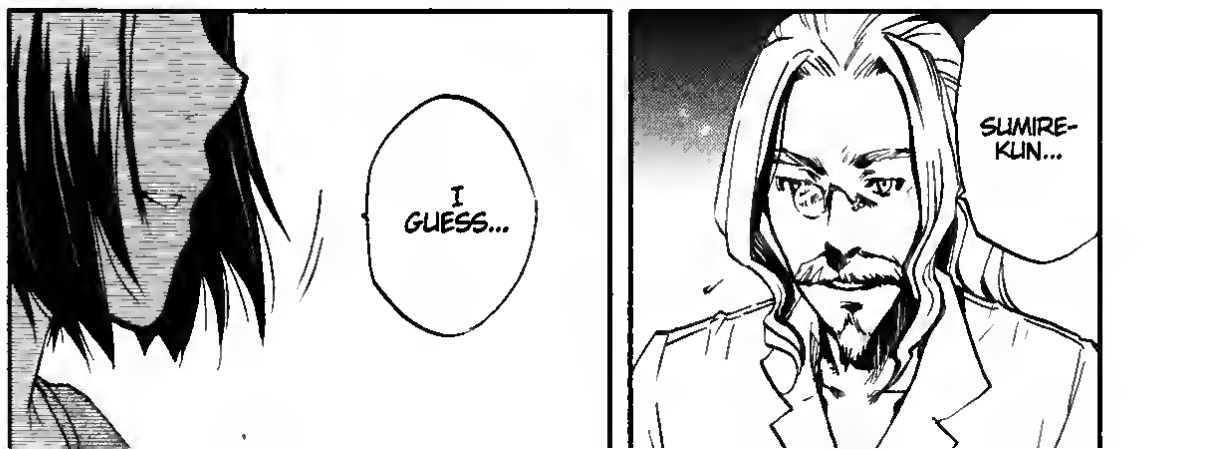

OH, NAHASHI-SAN?
ON A DIFFERENT SUBJECT, THE EMBLEM USED FOR THE VENUS VANGARD LOGO...
IS IT SOMETHING THAT LUCIA-SAN CREATED?


ER...
AH...
BLUSH
I-IS THERE SOME PROBLEM WITH THAT, SUMIRE-KUN?!
AM I RIGHT ...??
HEH HEH HEH


THIS IS THE FLEUR-DE-LIS.
THAT'S FRENCH FOR "LILY FLOWER."
IT CAN ALSO BE CALLED FLEUR-DE-LUCE, "FLOWER OF LIGHT."

NO. SHE WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO YOU...
WASN'T SHE?
SHE MUST'VE BEEN A REALLY INCREDIBLE PERSON.
IT SOUNDS LIKE EVERY-BODY WAS IN LOVE WITH HER.
TSK
BLUSH


AND I THINK...
SHE LOVED EVERYBODY RIGHT BACK.

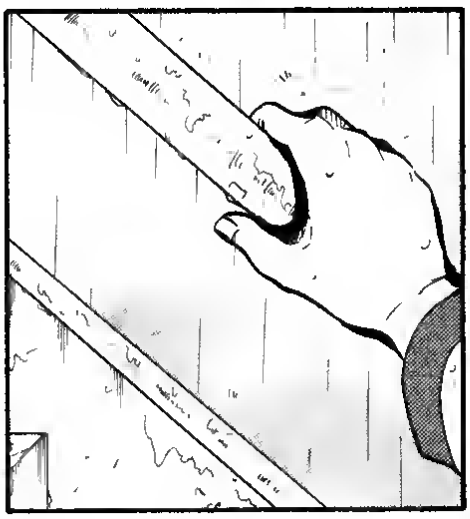

SUMIRE-KUN...
I GUESS...

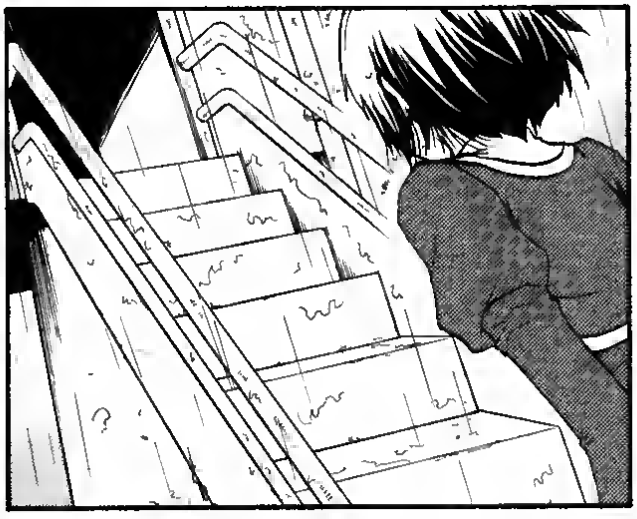
THERE'S A LOT I CAN LEARN FROM HER.
ZING
……?
FOR A MOMENT THERE, HER EYES LOOKED ALMOST LIKE--
BIIING BOOONG
BAM!
HHOOOOO!
3-A
♫ SUMIIIIRE !!!
SCHOOL'S DONE FOR THE DAY!! YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS! A PROPER MAIDEN'S GOLDEN HOURS HAVE BEGUN!!

SUMIRE-CHAAAN!!
HUH?
SHE'S GONE HOME ALREADY?
THINK SHE'S SICK?
DUNNO ...
OH, NENE-CHAN. RIKU-KUN.
HEY THERE!
H-HI. IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
WHOA! WOW, RIKU-KUN! YOU'VE GROWN A WHOLE LOT SINCE I LAST SAW YOU!
HUH? Y-YOU REALLY THINK SO?!
OHO HO HO! YOU'RE TELLING ME! IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE HE OUTGROWS US BOTH!
BUT ANYWAY, ENOUGH ABOUT THAT!
I'VE BEEN COOPED UP IN MY ROOM, STUDYING FOR EXAMS FOR SO LONG, IT SERIOUSLY FEELS LIKE I'M STARTING TO GATHER COBWEBS!
BLAB
IF I DON'T GET OUT AND HIT A FEW SWEET SHOPS, I MIGHT JUST GO COMPLETELY CRAZY! SO I WAS THINKING THE THREE OF US COULD GO GET SOME CAKE.
BLAB
AHA HA HA...
THAT SOUNDS LIKE THE KIND OF LAME PICK-UP LINE AN OLD MAN WOULD USE, NEECHAN.
UM...
YOU'RE COMING, RIGHT?
SMILE
WHUMP

I NEED SOME TIME TO MYSELF RIGHT NOW.
THANKS FOR THE INVITATION, THOUGH.
ACTUALLY, I CAN'T. I'M SORRY, NENE-CHAN.
HMM. Y'KNOW ...
SHE USED TO BE SUCH A FLIGHTY THING.
AH, WELL. LOOKS LIKE THE GAP JUST GOT THAT MUCH WIDER, HUH, RIKU?
URK!
I THOUGHT I WAS GETTING CLOSER!
SINCE WHEN DID SHE LEARN TO SAY MATURE, SERENE STUFF LIKE THAT?
MAKES ME FEEL KINDA LONELY INSIDE

I'M NOT CRYING! IT'S JUST RAINING IN MY HEART!!
HEY! WHAT'RE YOU CRYING ABOUT?! C'MON! WE'RE GOING HOME!
WAP
GUESS IT'S JUST NOT MEANT TO BE.
IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S GOING TO START RAINING SOON.
CRAP.
GLOOOOM
UH-OH...
PLIP
.....
I'D BETTER HURRY.
IT'S STARTING TO RAIN...
ON SECOND THOUGHT, I KNOW OF A PLACE I CAN WAIT IT OUT...





IT'S REALLY STARTED COMING DOWN, HASN'T IT?
OH, HEY, SUMIRE-CHAN!

STUPID...
THERE'S NO WAY HE'D ACTUALLY BE HERE.

NNH...

SHF

AH...
AHH...
WAAAAAAH...!
HHAAAA
FSSSSHHHHHH

Jewelry
and
Clothes

Venus Vangard

Piece 29 DISTANT. NIGHT SCENERY.

CLENCH

COME!
SALAMANDER, WREATHED IN FLAMES, I BID THEE COME!
SHOO
SHF
FWOOOSH

WHOOSH

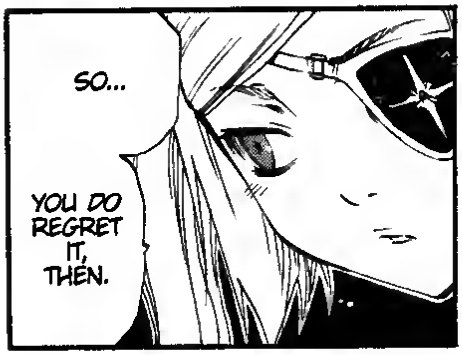
!!
FWOOOO
BOOOOM
WHO
KYAA!!
SWISH
PATTER
THAT...

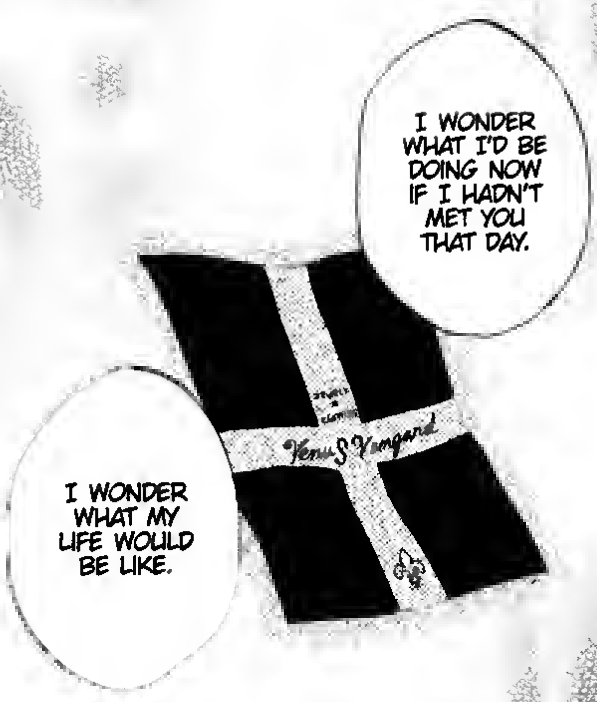
HEY.
IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT FOR SNEAKING AROUND AND SPYING ON ME.
URK
PATTER
THAT WAS MEAN, LUCIA-SAN!!
BUT IT'S JUST, UM...
YOU...
YOU LOOK SO BEAUTIFUL WHEN YOU DO THAT.
SIGH

PRACTICING OUT HERE LETS ME WORK ON MY CONTROL.
THANKS
HERE
YEAH. THE UNDERGROUND TRAINING ROOM DOESN'T HAVE VERY MANY ELEMENTS FLOATING AROUND.
I'VE NOTICED YOU'RE COMING OUT HERE TO PRACTICE A LOT NOW.
BLRRRR
HM?
WOW... THIS TEA IS PRETTY GOOD.
EHEH HEH
A NEW TEA SHOP OPENED UP BY THE TRAIN STATION.
THEY HAD SOOO MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF TEA THERE!
NICE...!
I KNOW! WHY DON'T WE ALL GO ON A REAL PICNIC SOMEDAY!
NOW'S HARDLY THE TIME TO BE PLANNING PICNICS, YOU KNOW. -)
BESIDES, THE RAINY SEASON'S GOING TO START ANY DAY NOW.
OH...
HEE HEE!
Y'KNOW, THIS ALMOST FEELS LIKE WE'RE ♪ HAVING A PICNIC.
SIGH
ONLY IF IT WEREN'T THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.

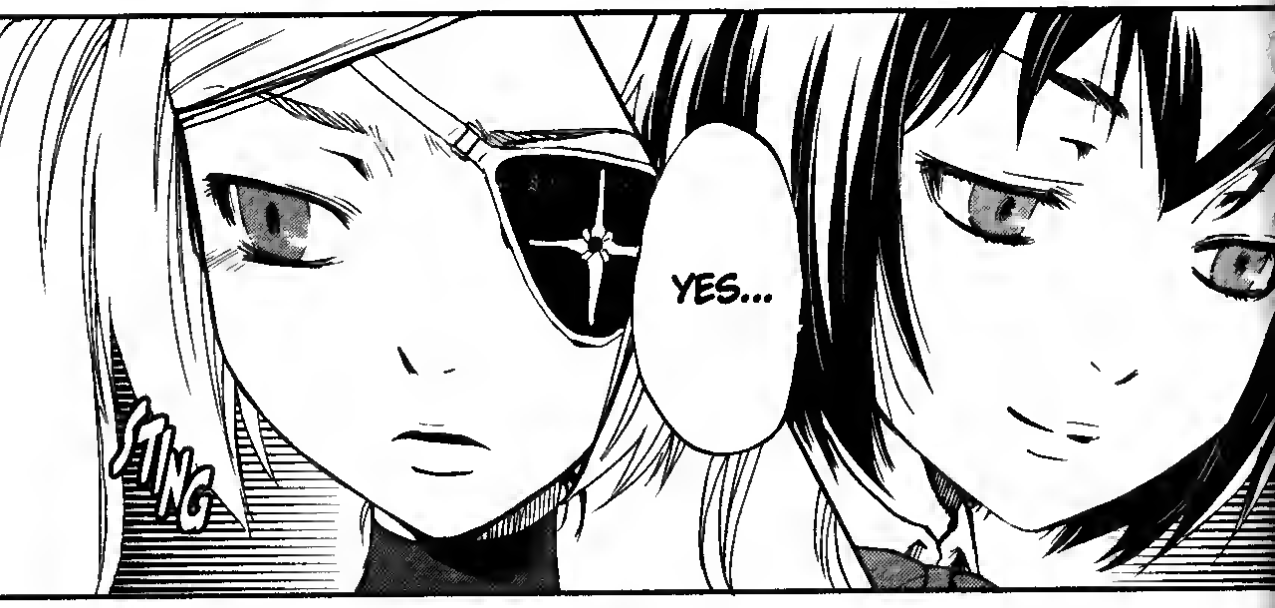
IT MIGHT NOT BE THAT BAD OF AN IDEA.
STILL...
MAYBE ...
NEXT SPRING, ONCE EVERYTHING'S OVER...
WE CAN PICK THE PERFECT DAY.
SO THAT MEANS NEXT MONTH, IT'LL BE EXACTLY A YEAR.
I HAD JUST TURNED FIFTEEN BEFORE I MET YOU...
HM? YEAH...
HEY, THAT REMINDS ME! IT'S BEEN ALMOST ONE WHOLE YEAR SINCE I FIRST CAME TO VENUS VANGARD.

.....

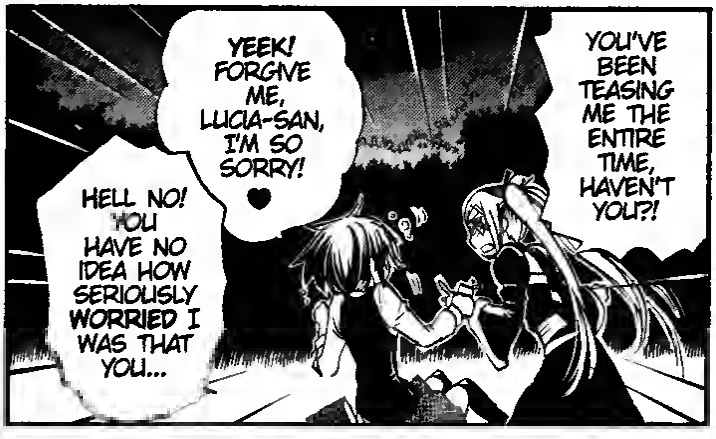

SO...
YOU DO REGRET IT, THEN.


I WONDER WHAT I'D BE DOING NOW IF I HADN'T MET YOU THAT DAY.
I WONDER WHAT MY LIFE WOULD BE LIKE.

HMM ...


YES...
STING

I REALLY REGRET...
NOT MEETING YOU A LOT SOONER!


YEEK! FORGIVE ME, LUCIA-SAN, I'M SO SORRY!
HELL NO! YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW SERIOUSLY WORRIED I WAS THAT YOU...
YOU'VE BEEN TEASING ME THE ENTIRE TIME, HAVEN'T YOU?!

I MEAN, YOU MUST'VE BEEN ABSOLUTELY ADORABLE WHEN YOU WERE LITTLE!
GRRRRRR
HEH HEH HEH HEH!
SUMIRE!

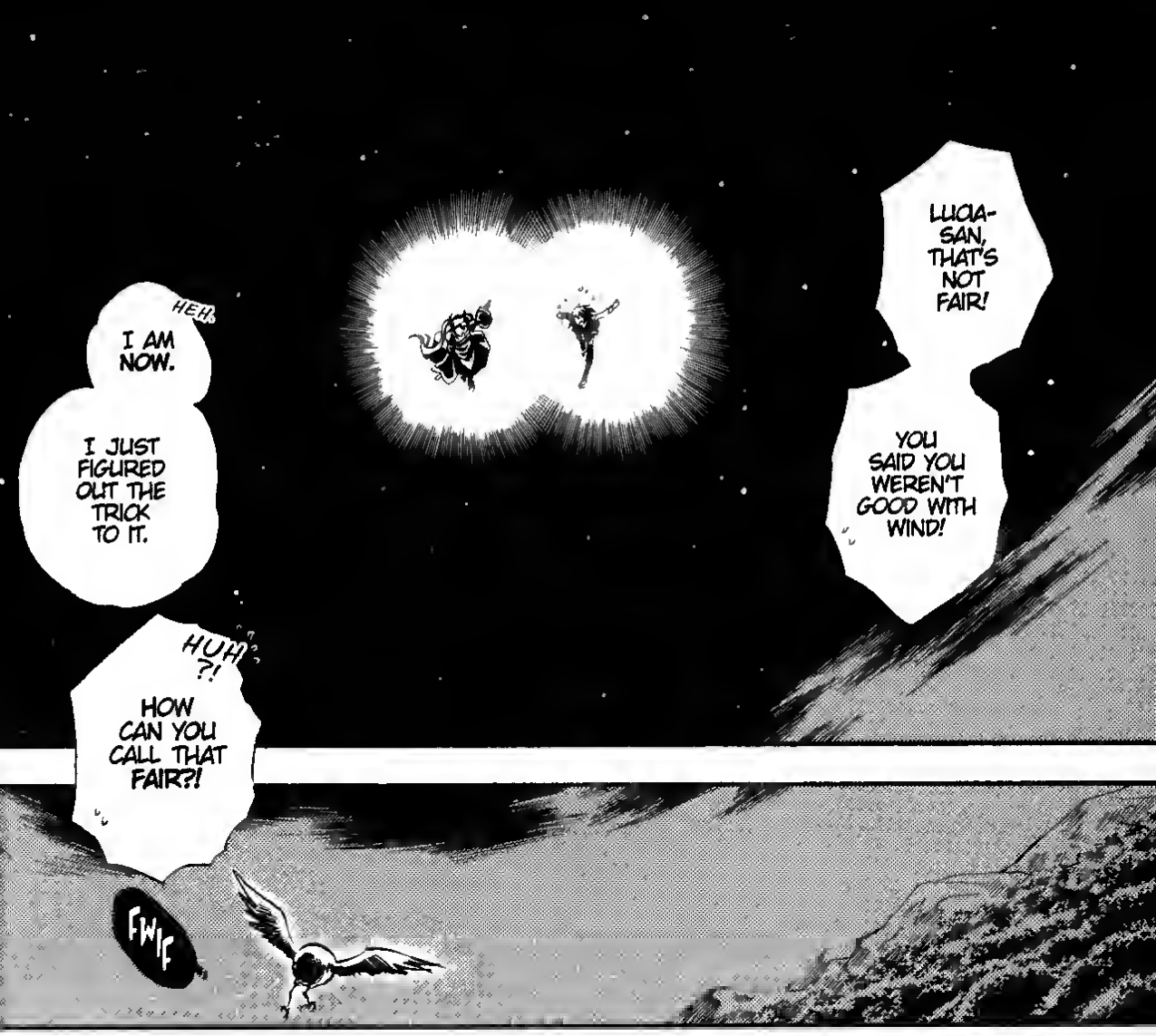
OH! I-I'M SORRY...

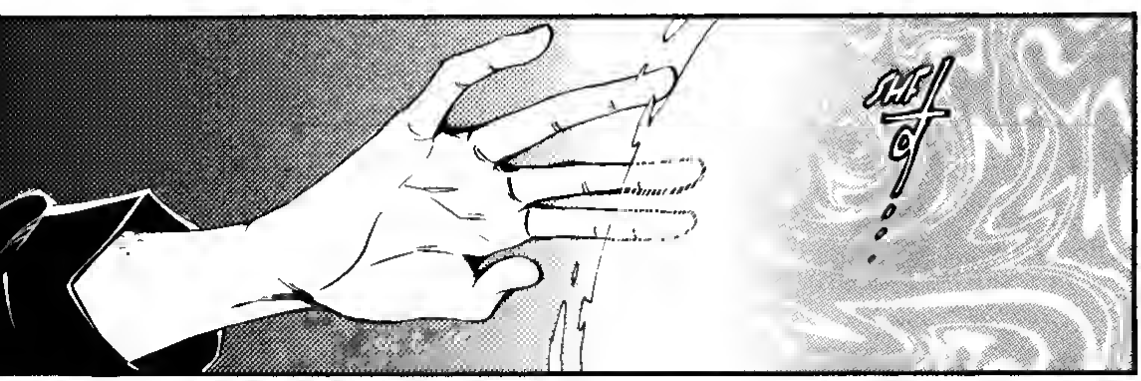
HUH...?
HN!
WHP

I'VE PRETTY MUCH GOTTEN THE HANG OF FIRE.
BUT I'M NOT THAT GOOD AT CONTROLLING WIND YET.
"SORRY" WON'T CUT IT...
HMPH!
YOU'RE JUST GOING TO HAVE TO COME ALONG WITH ME FOR THE GRAND FINALE.
"FINALE" ...?
SO YOU'RE GOING TO RACE ME BACK TO THE SHOP.
IF YOU CAN BEAT ME, I MIGHT CONSIDER FORGIVING YOU THIS TIME.
SURE.
I ACCEPT.
GOOD.
READY ...

GO!!
FWOOOSH

SWOOP
WHA ...?!

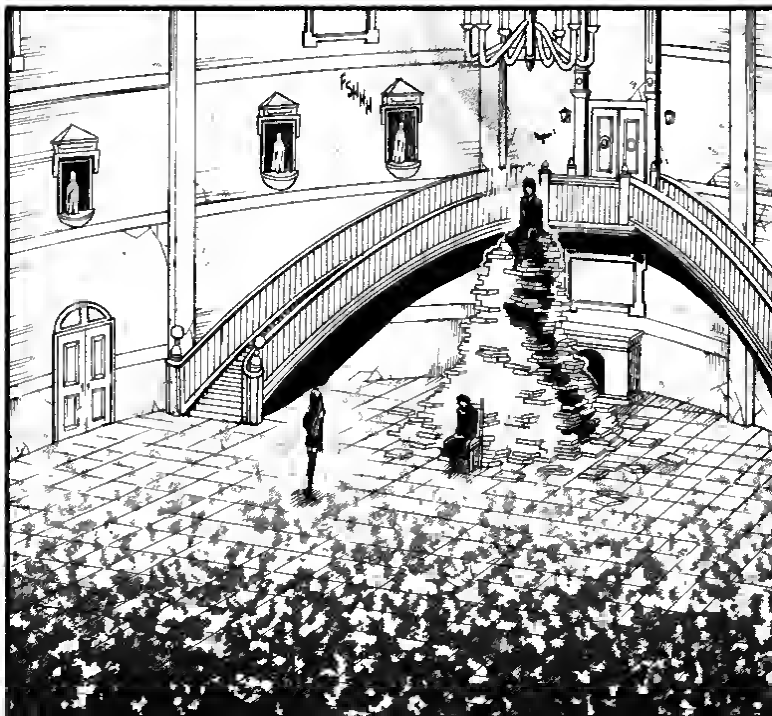

LUCIA-SAN, THAT'S NOT FAIR!
YOU SAID YOU WEREN'T GOOD WITH WIND!
HEH.
I AM NOW.
I JUST FIGURED OUT THE TRICK TO IT.
HUH?!
HOW CAN YOU CALL THAT FAIR?!
FWIP


SHIT!

HOW LOVELY...
THEY ARE LIKE BEAUTIFUL FALLING STARS, GROWING EVER MORE BRILLIANT...
AS THEY PLUNGE TOWARD THEIR INEVITABLE DEATHS.
ｱﾊﾊﾊﾊ

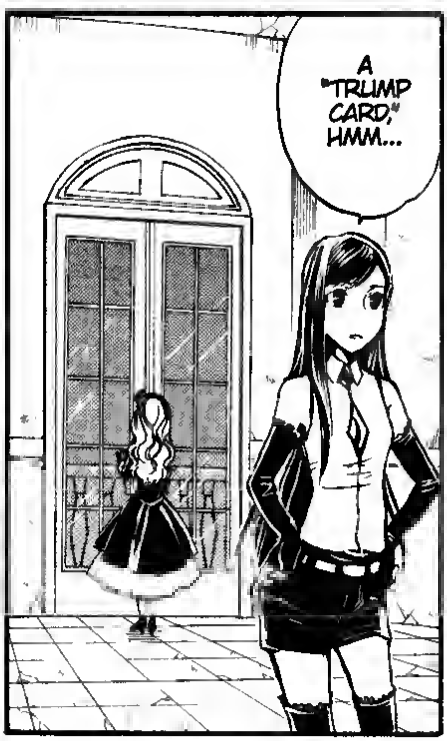
SOON...
SOON THAT BRIGHT GLORY WILL LIGHT MY NEW WORLD.

.....



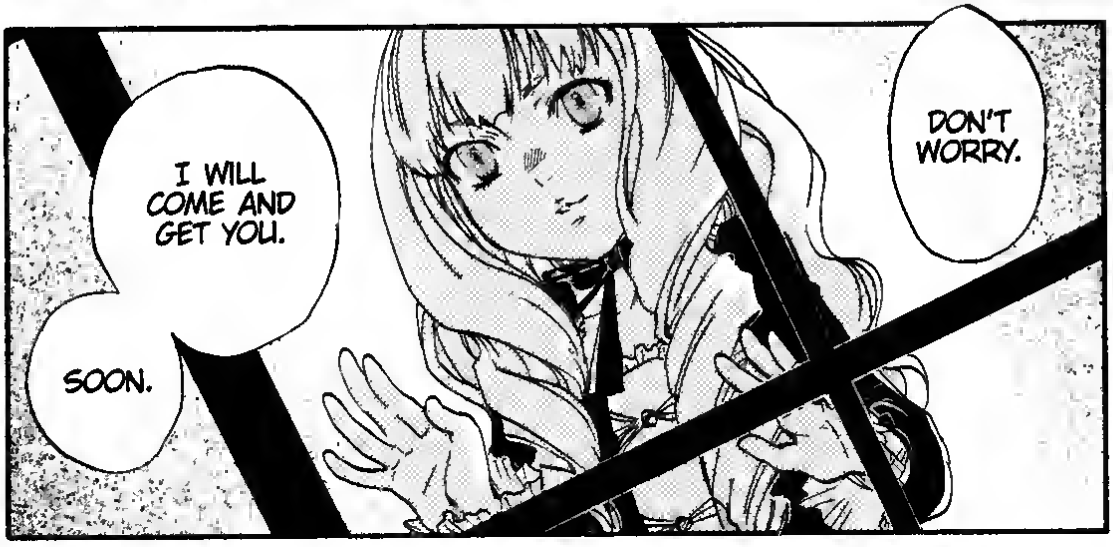
I DIDN'T KNOW YOU STILL HAD... THAT LYING AROUND.
AION-SAMA...
STARE
SOMETHING SO OLD AND WORN CAN'T POSSIBLY HAVE ANY USE LEFT.
CAN IT NOT BE DISPOSED OF?
BUT THIS WORLD IS A WORLD OF MATERIAL THINGS, AND IT PLACES MUCH VALUE ON THOSE SORTS OF VESSELS.
IT MAY BE MEANINGLESS TO US...
HENCE, IT STILL HAS ITS USES.
.....
NO, NOT YET.

MUCH LIKE *THIS* DOES, AS A "TRUMP CARD."

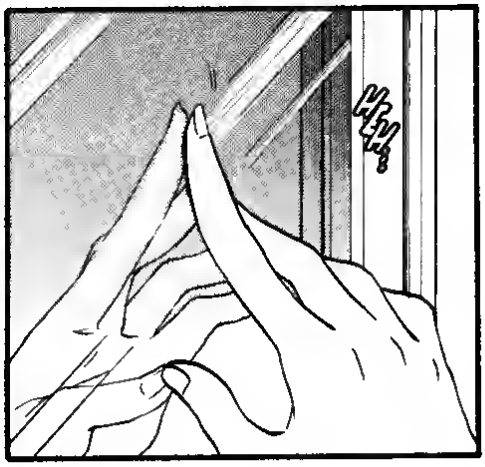

A "TRUMP CARD," HMM...

ARE YOU LONELY ?

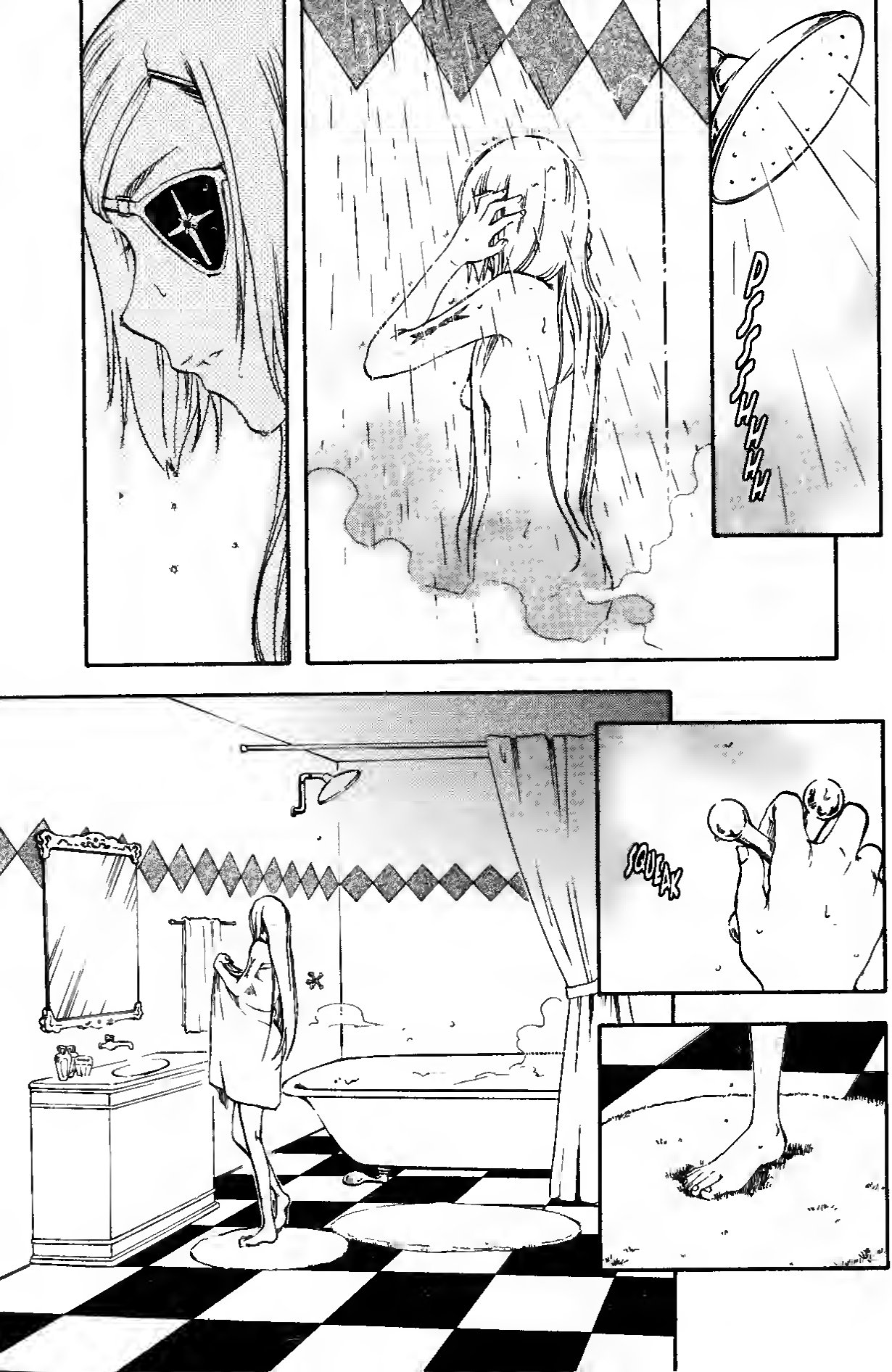
LOLA...

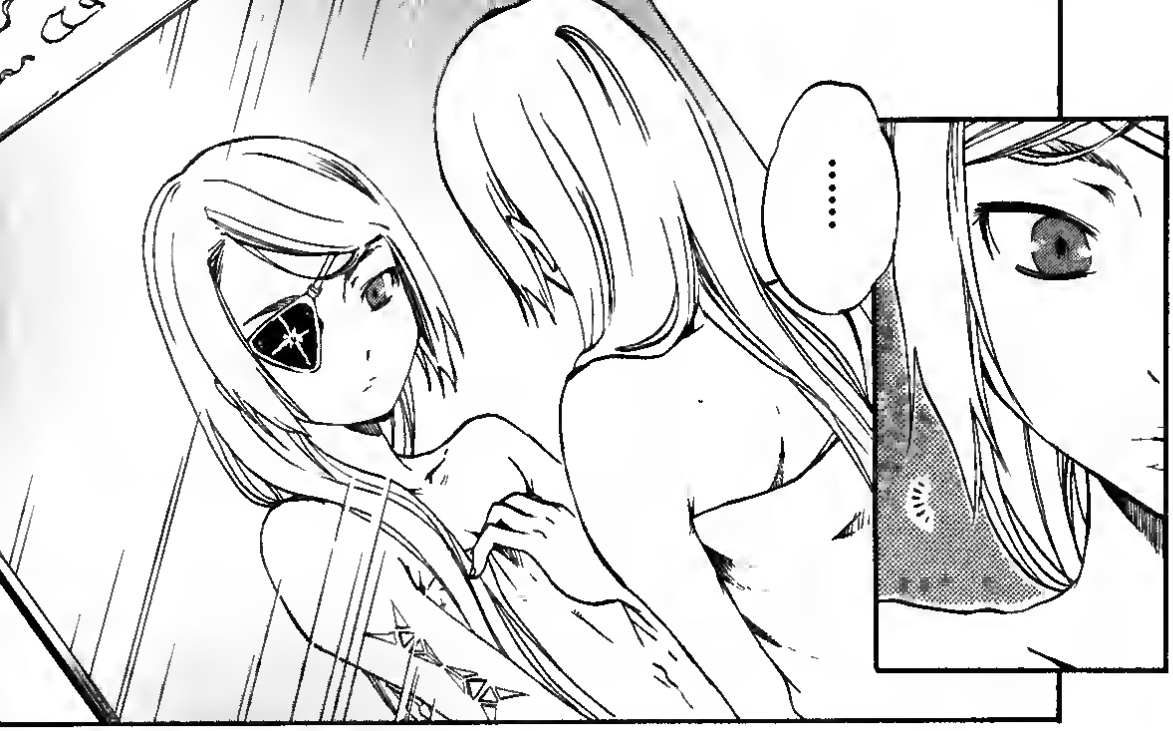

I WILL COME AND GET YOU.
SOON.
DON'T WORRY.

THEN...


HEH.

FOREVER.
THE TWO OF US CAN BECOME ONE.
PSHHH


PFFHHH
SQUEAK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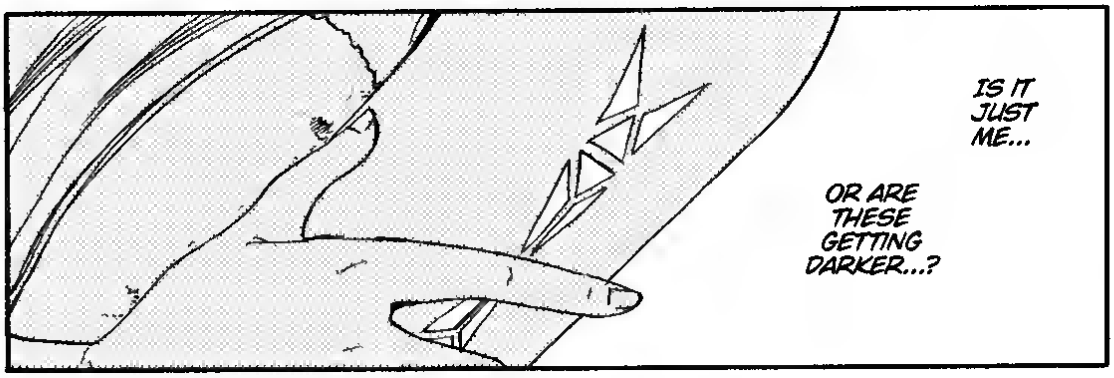
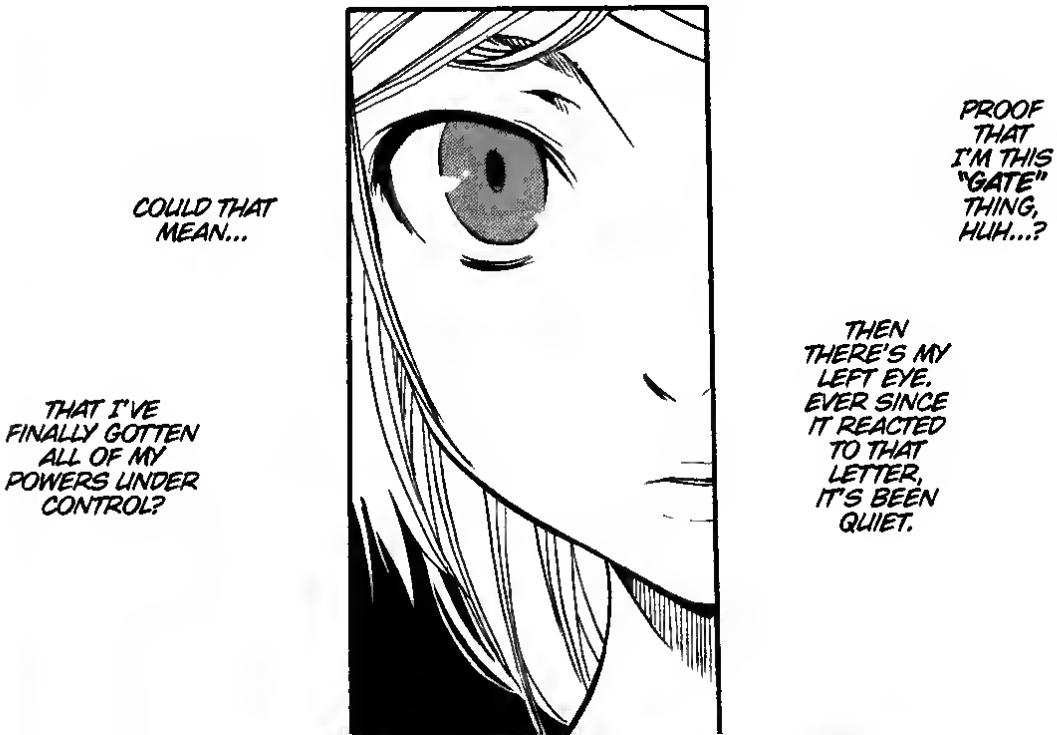
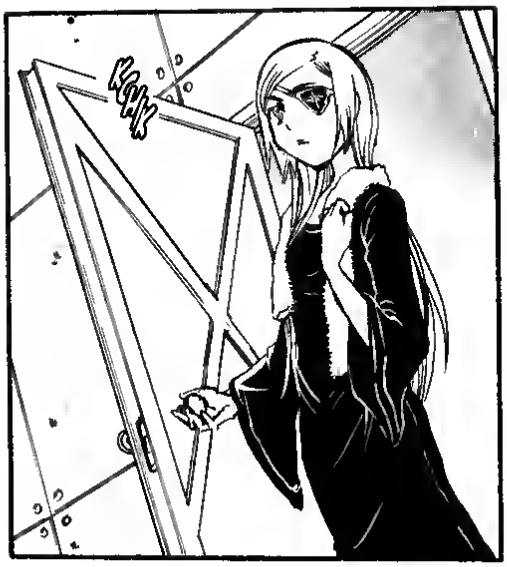
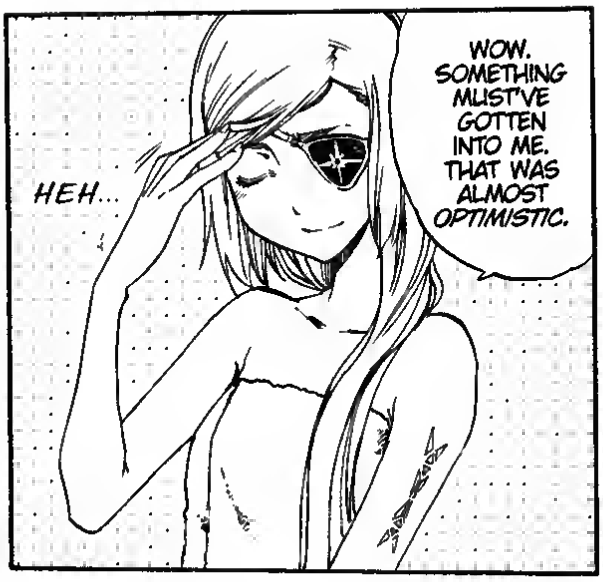
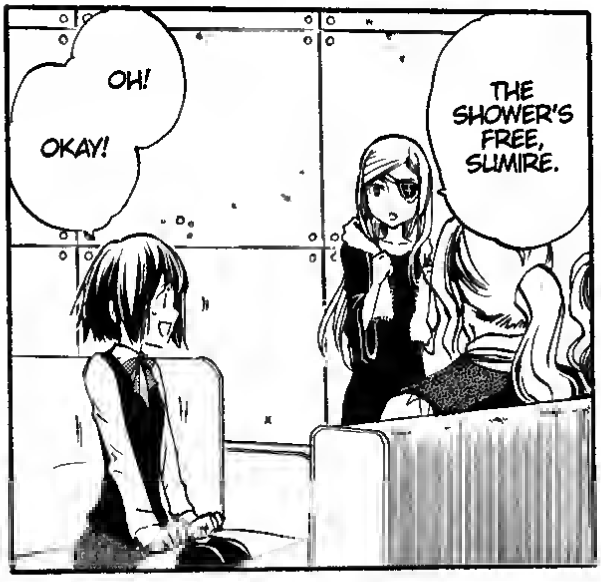

IS IT JUST ME...
OR ARE THESE GETTING DARKER...?


PROOF THAT I'M THIS "GATE" THING, HUH...?
COULD THAT MEAN...
THEN THERE'S MY LEFT EYE. EVER SINCE IT REACTED TO THAT LETTER, IT'S BEEN QUIET.
THAT I'VE FINALLY GOTTEN ALL OF MY POWERS UNDER CONTROL?

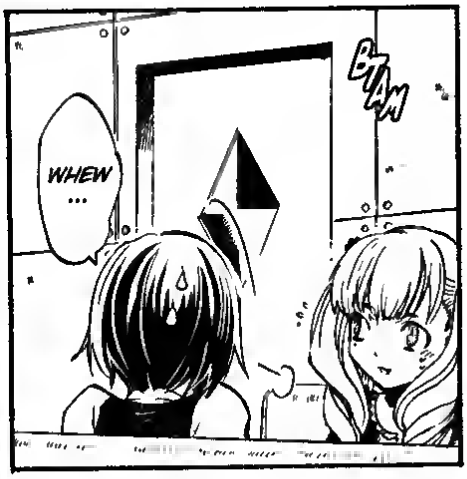

HUH?

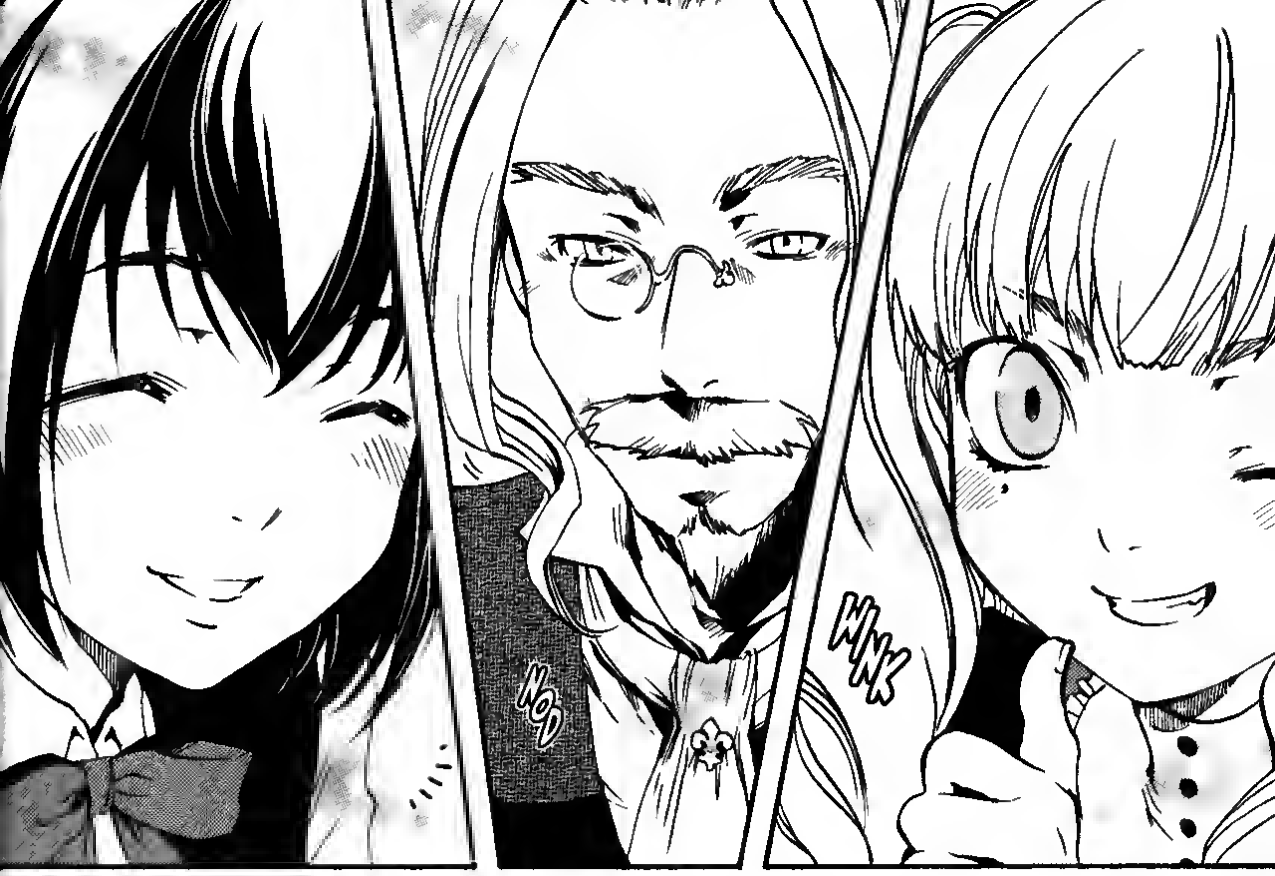

WOW. SOMETHING MUST'VE GOTTEN INTO ME. THAT WAS ALMOST OPTIMISTIC.
HEH...

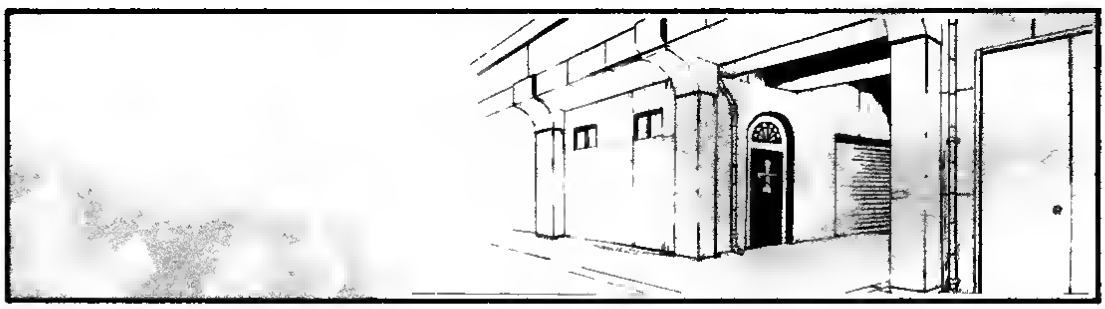

OH!
OKAY!
THE SHOWER'S FREE, SUMIRE.

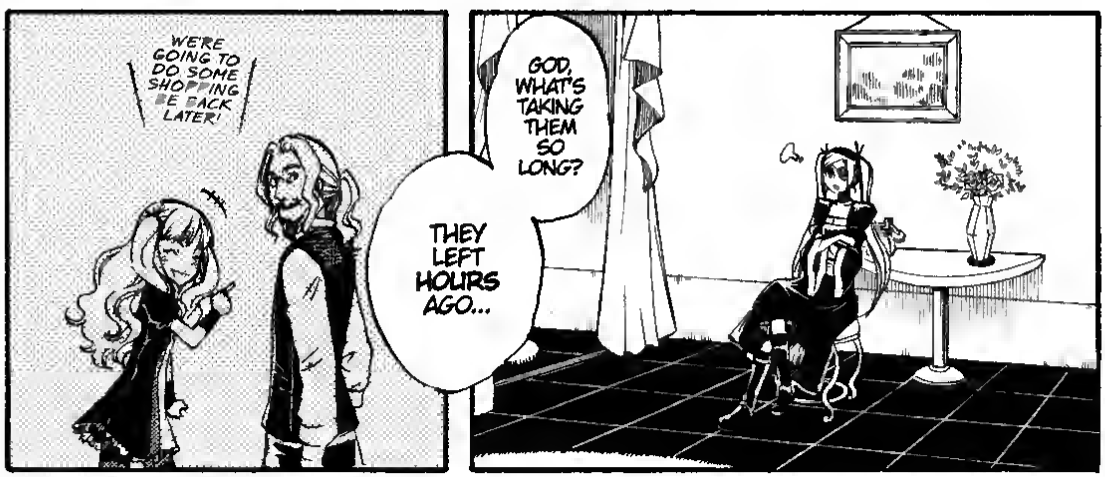
AH!
SHH!
TWITCH

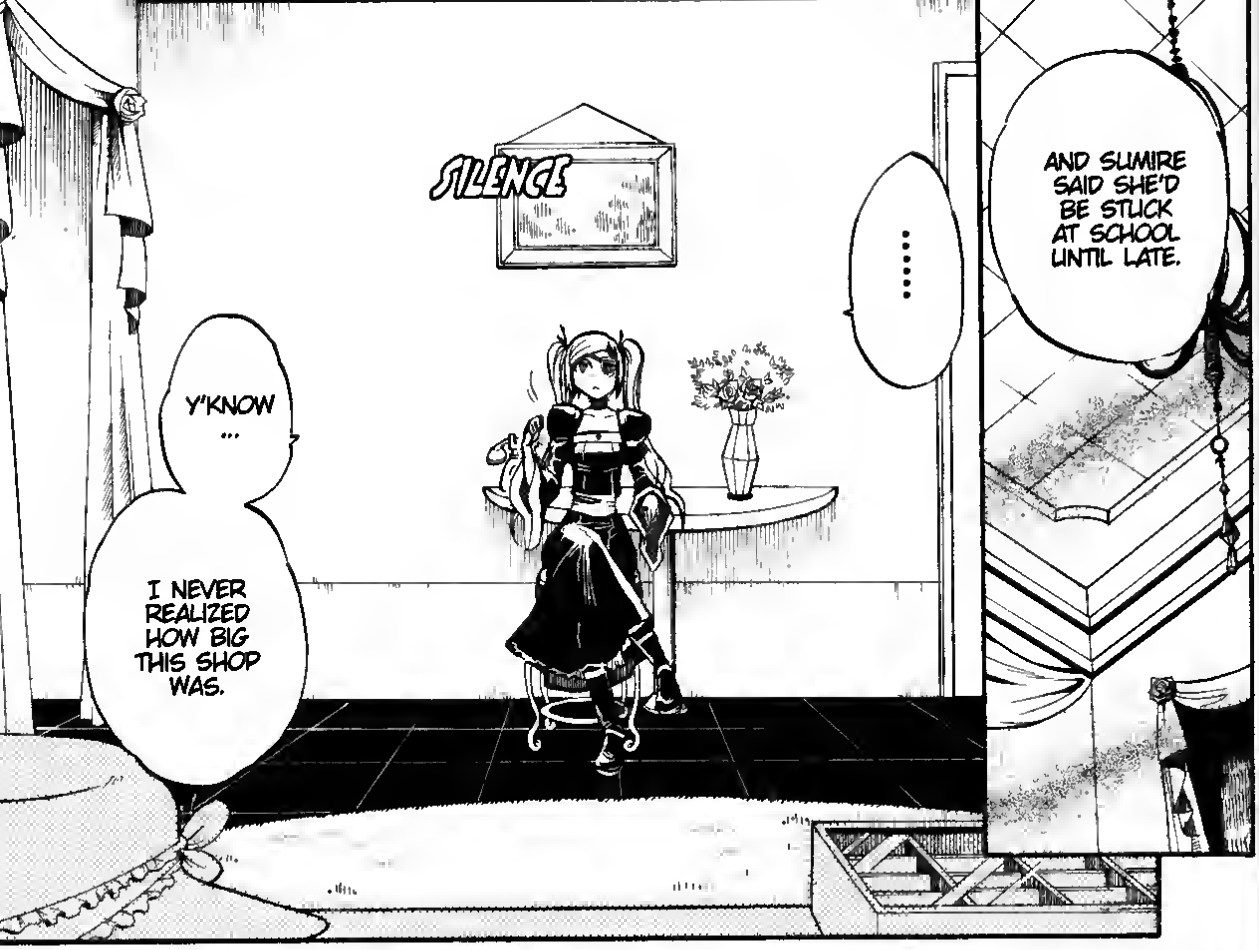
IT'S A PLAN, THEN. ♥
OKAY.
BLIT

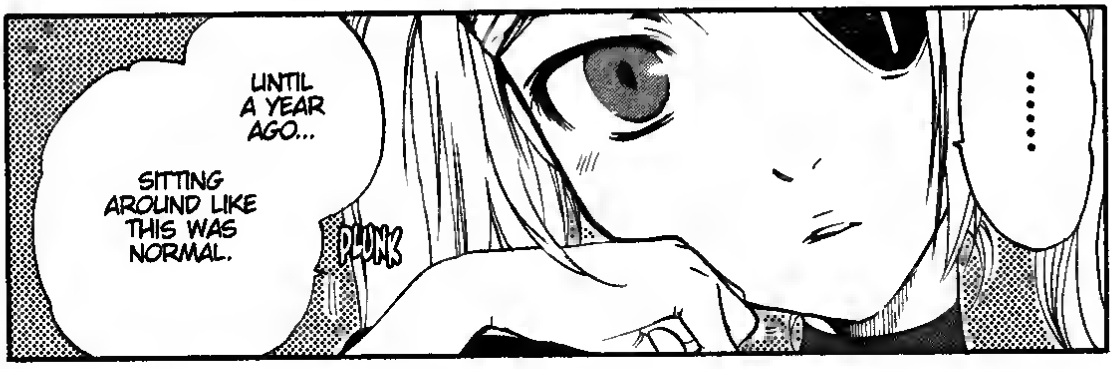

WHEW...
BLAM

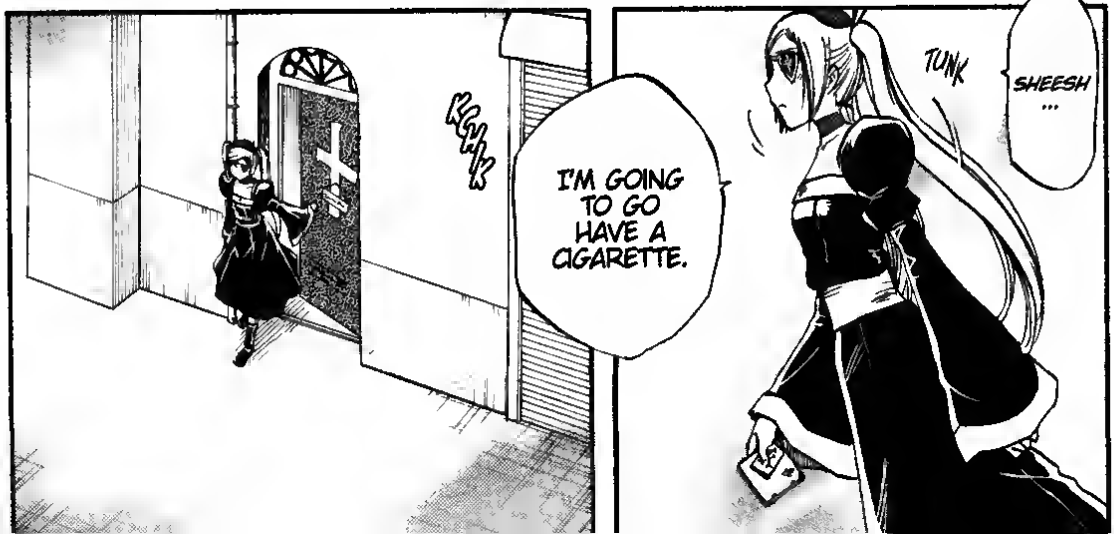

NOD
WINK




WE'RE GOING TO DO SOME SHOPPING BE BACK LATER!
THEY LEFT HOURS AGO...
GOD, WHAT'S TAKING THEM SO LONG?


SILENCE
AND SUMIRE SAID SHE'D BE STUCK AT SCHOOL UNTIL LATE.
.....
Y'KNOW ...
I NEVER REALIZED HOW BIG THIS SHOP WAS.


.....
UNTIL A YEAR AGO...
SITTING AROUND LIKE THIS WAS NORMAL.
PLONK


SHEESH ...
TUNK
I'M GOING TO GO HAVE A CIGARETTE.
KCHK

LUCIA-SAN, LISTEN TO ME!
YOU SHOULD QUIT!
.....
OUT OF FLUID.
?
FSK
FSK
UGH, DO YOU HAVE TO HARP ON THIS NOW?
B-BUT ...!
IT'S BAD FOR YOUR SKIN, YOUR TEETH...
BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH ENTIRELY!
RIGHT, RIGHT. I HEAR YOU...

WHO KNEW ...?
THIS IS FOR YOUR OWN SAKE, LUCIA-SAN!!
SHE CAN BE SO PERSISTENT WHEN SHE TRIES.
FSH
SHF
WHP

CHAK
FWISH
I SAW SOMETHING OVER THERE.
I KNOW I DID!
!
FSH
BUT WHAT WAS IT DOING THIS CLOSE TO THE SHOP'S KEKKAI?
AND IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY!

?!
IT... VANISHED ?
BLAM
ARGH!
FP
!
FSH
FWO
IF THAT'S THE CASE...
SO THAT MEANS IT'S NOT YOUR TYPICAL SMALL FRY.
FSH
THAT'S DEFINITELY NOT A NORMAL MOVEMENT PATTERN.

FWISH
KAK
NO WAY I'M LETTING IT ESCAPE!
FWOOSH
!
FTH
HOLD IT!!

SWOOSH
!
GOTCHA!
FWIP

!!
WHAT?
IT WAS JUST AN ILLUSION...
?!

WAIT... THIS PLACE...
!
SHIVER

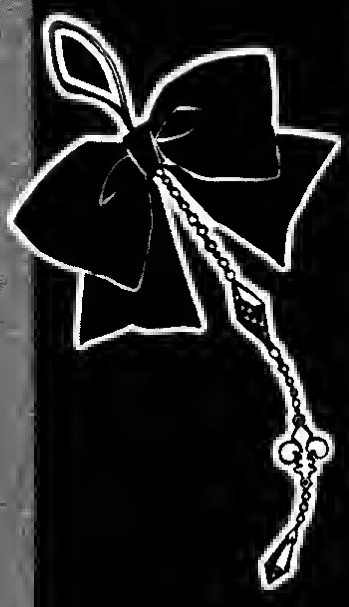
HI THERE.
A GUY...?

UH...
WHO ARE YOU...?
TWITCH
AH, YES...
TECHNICALLY, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE HAVE MET. IT'S ENTIRELY MY PLEASURE...

"LUCIA-SAN."

Jewelry
and
Clothes

Venus Vangard



HMM...
UMMM...
A-HA!
HRM...
WHAT DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD GET?
WELL...
AH! SUMIRE!
I WAS AFRAID THAT I WOULD BE LATE!
NAHASHI-SAN! LOLA-CHAN!

HEE!
ACTUALLY ...
I ALREADY HAVE THE PERFECT THING IN MIND!
YOU'VE GOT PERFECT TIMING!
I'VE GOT NO IDEA OF WHAT TO GET FOR LUCIA'S PRESENT.
I, TOO, AM HAVING DIFFICULTY DECIDING. SADLY, THAT IS A USUAL OCCURRENCE FOR ME. MOST YEARS, I FIND MYSELF SIMPLY GIVING HER FLOWERS.
YOU DO?
TELL US! TELL US!
SEE, I FIGURED THAT...
AHH, I SEE.
OOH! THAT'S A GOOD ONE!
EVERY-BODY AGREES? GREAT!
LET US BE ABOUT IT, THEN.
LUCIA WILL BECOME SUSPICIOUS IF WE DALLY TOO LONG.
ONLY THREE DAYS LEFT, HUH...?
HEE HEE HEE...
I HOPE LUCIA-SAN WILL LIKE IT!

Piece 30
CELEBRATIONS. CURSES.

WHAT...
HOW... HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME?
WHO ARE YOU?
GUN
WHO AM I...?
THAT IS A GOOD QUESTION.

HOW IS SUMIRE-CHAN DOING? IS SHE WELL?
BY THE WAY, LUCIA-SAN...
!
HEY!
GRR
HER "YOSHIKI-SAN"...
RIGHT?
SMILE
GLNGH
NO WAY...! YOU'RE...

CORRECT!
WELL, ONLY PARTLY.
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
?
YES.
I NOW CALL MYSELF...
AION.
HA...

SUMIRE'S GOT WORSE TASTE IN MEN THAN I THOUGHT.
I'M SURPRISED THAT SHE'D PICK SOMEONE WITH SUCH A BAD SENSE OF HUMOR.
HE'S JOKING.
SO I WONDERED WHAT KIND OF GUY SHE HAD FOUND FOR HERSELF.
SUMIRE ALWAYS WENT ON AND ON ABOUT "YOSHIKI-SAN" ...
HA HA HA
M-M-M-
HA HA HA!
NOW THAT WAS HARDLY NICE TO SAY!
HE'S GOT TO BE.
BUT...
BUT ASSUMING WHAT HE SAID IS TRUE...
WHO WAS DOING IT? AND WHY?
IT'S MAGI INCENSE.
THEN THE WHOLE PLANETARIUM SCENE, AND THE MAGI INCENSE IN THE PARK...
IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE.
HONESTLY, SHE'S GOT NO TASTE AT ALL.
BUT...
SO...
IF THAT'S THE CASE...

THIS WHOLE TIME...
EVERY-THING YOU'VE SAID TO SUMIRE ...
WAS A LIE SO YOU COULD TRICK HER?!!

FWOO
NOW, NOW.
DON'T BE HASTY. THAT'S ALL A MIS-UNDER-STANDING.
THMP!!!

WHAT I'M TRYING TO DO IS SAVE THE TWO OF YOU.
SWF
A KEKKAI!
WHA ...?!
!!
CRAP! THIS WAS ALL A SET-UP!

HERE. LET ME SHOW YOU SOMETHING INTERESTING.
GASP!!!
?!
SHYZING
AAAAH...!!

THE SCENT OF BLOOD.
MINE...
Hah
AND SUMIRE'S!
AAAAH...!

THIS...
I...
GRIND
I'M... NOT GOING... TO FALL FOR THAT!
TREMBLE
THIS CAN'T...

GLARE
REALLY NOW...?
WAD
YES!
THAT WAS JUST ANOTHER ILLUSION YOU MADE UP!!
AHA HA HA
IF YOU TRULY BELIEVE THAT WAS A LIE...
THEN WHY ARE YOU CRYING?
!
.....
YOU ARE MISTAKEN, LUCIA-SAN.

I CAN CHANGE THE SAD FUTURE THAT AWAITS YOU.
ALL I WANT IS TO HELP YOU.
I CAN SAVE YOU...
FROM THE TRAGIC DESTINY OF THE GATE AND THE KEY.
SWISH
STAGGER
AH...
NNNGH ...
SHOVE

AH WELL...
SIGH
I WILL LEAVE YOU FOR TODAY.
HOWEVER, ONE FINAL ITEM...
HMM
NGH ...!
HUFF
HUFF
FLOMP
HERE.
WOULD YOU BE KIND ENOUGH TO GIVE THIS TO SUMIRE-CHAN FOR ME?
SHE SAID SHE WAS VERY INTERESTED IN READING IT.
?!
LIKE HELL I'M GOING TO...
!

SHIVER
.....
HAH...
UNH...!
HOLY CRAP!
I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW MUCH POWER HE HAD WHILE JUST STANDING THERE...!!!
I... I'VE GOT TO TELL HER...
I'VE GOT TO TELL SUMIRE ABOUT HIM...
URK...
KOFF...

VenuS Vanguard
OPEN
LUCIA-SAN, THERE YOU ARE!
WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? YOU LEFT THE SHOP WITHOUT ANYBODY HERE TO WATCH IT!
AH!
OH...
NAHASHI-SAN AND LOLA-CHAN CAME BACK EARLIER.
THEY WERE REALLY SURPRISED WHEN THEY GOT HERE AND COULDN'T FIND YOU!
I, UM, JUST WENT OUT.
I NEEDED SOME CIGARETTES.
HUH? BUT I FOUND THESE LYING ON THE GROUND OUTSIDE...
UM... I WANTED TO TRY A DIFFERENT BRAND.
CIGARETTE CASE & LIGHTER

BAM
(HUFF)
KCHK
I KNOW, I KNOW.
STAFF
YOU REALLY SHOULD TRY TO CUT BACK.
I HAVE TO TELL HER...
I NEED TO TELL HER, BUT...
HUFF
HUFF
BTHMP
AH ...!
NGH!
BTHMP
HUFF

!!
WISH
BLN
TP TP TP
FLUSHHHH
HUH?
UM...
WHERE WAS THIS PLACE AGAIN? I CAN'T REMEMBER...
?
SLASH

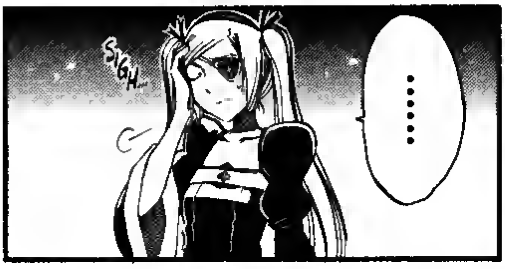
NOOO!!!
!!
AH...
BA-THU
YOU WERE MOANING AND THRASHING ABOUT IN YOUR SLEEP.
OH...
TWITCH
SUMIRE ...?
YOU OKAY?
I-IT'S NOTHING. I JUST HAD A, UM, WEIRD DREAM, THAT'S ALL.
I HOPE I DIDN'T WAKE YOU UP.
HURRY
NAH. I HAD A BAD DREAM MYSELF A FEW MINUTES AGO.
AHAHAHA
I GUESS WE BOTH ATE SOMETHING FUNNY AT DINNER.
.....
LUCIA-SAN...?

DO YOU MIND IF I SLEEP OVER THERE AGAIN TONIGHT...?
HUH?
OH, UH, S--
ER, NO. SORRY. I'D RATHER IF YOU DIDN'T.
KOFF
OH...
HAH
I, UH, THINK I MIGHT BE COMING DOWN WITH SOMETHING.
KOFF
KOFF
OH NO! ARE YOU FEELING ALL RIGHT?
Y-YEAH. I JUST NEED SOME REST.
YOU SHOULD GET SOME SLEEP TOO.
OKAY ...
SHFL SHFL
.....
UM, SUMIRE ...?

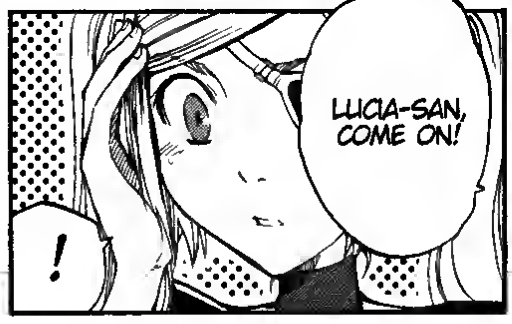
YEAH?
NEVER MIND...
IT'S NOTHING.
SHF

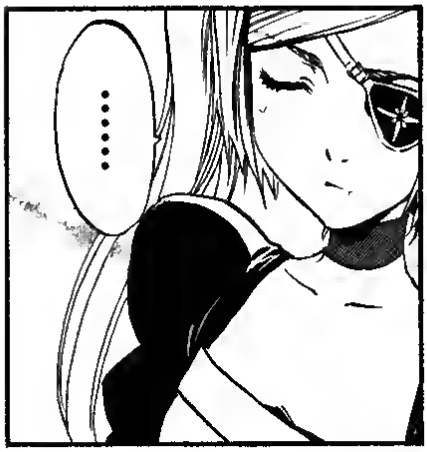
THERE!
HUH...? OH, UH, SURE.
YOU'RE SURE WORKING HARD TODAY
NOW LET'S GO AND GET THE NEXT BOX OF SUMMER THINGS OUT OF STORAGE!

SHE NEEDS TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT THAT GUY.
I HAVE TO TELL HER...


SIGH...
.....

I'VE GOT TO TELL HER SOON.
BUT...


LUCIA-SAN, COME ON!
!


.....

SHEESH. WHICH ONE OF US IS THE OWNER AROUND HERE?
SIGH
STOP SPACING OUT AND HELP ME WITH THIS!
!!!
STAFF
SHFL

PEEK
I'M COMING...
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT.
STAFF ONLY
READY!
RSTL
RSTL
ALL RIGHT!
EXCELLENT
LET US BEGIN WITH THE DECORATIONS, THEN.
WE'RE ALL SET!
LUCIA WILL BE TOO BUSY TO COME DOWN HERE FOR A WHILE.

KRRK
YEAH!
THIS'LL BE PERFECT!
LUCIA DOESN'T SUSPECT A THING!
HEE HEE HEE
OOH, THIS IS GONNA BE SO MUCH FUN! ♪
WE SHOULD HAVE PARTIES LIKE THIS EVERY WEEK!
LA LA LA♪
HEH HEH
TIME FLIES FASTER THAN YOU THINK. BEFORE YOU KNOW IT...
IT WILL BE TIME FOR SUMIRE-KUN'S BIRTHDAY, THEN YOURS.
AH! OJISAMA, OJISAMA!
WHEN'S YOUR BIRTHDAY?
HM? MINE?
Y-YOU NEEDN'T WORRY ABOUT THAT.
AWW!
YES, WE DO! C'MON, IT'LL BE FUN!

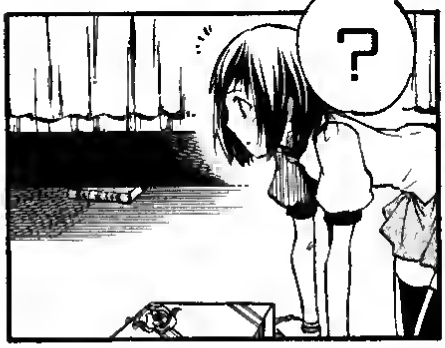
LUCIA, I HAVE AN ERRAND I WOULD LIKE FOR YOU TO RUN.
MUTTER
WEIRD...
MUTTER
THEY WENT SHOPPING JUST THE OTHER DAY.
K-KLAK
K-KLAK
BRRL
THERE, THAT SHOULD DO IT...
BTAM
I'M BA--
SHE'S HERE!
ONE, TWO...
HUH ...?

HAPPY BIRTHDAY
POP
AHH!
HUH ...?!

SO COME ON!
MAKE A WISH!
WHA?
LUCIA!!
PA-POP
.....
WE GOT EVERYTHING TOGETHER WHEN YOU WEREN'T LOOKING.
SURPRISE!
SEE? I TOLD YOU SHE HAD FORGOTTEN.
HEE HEE

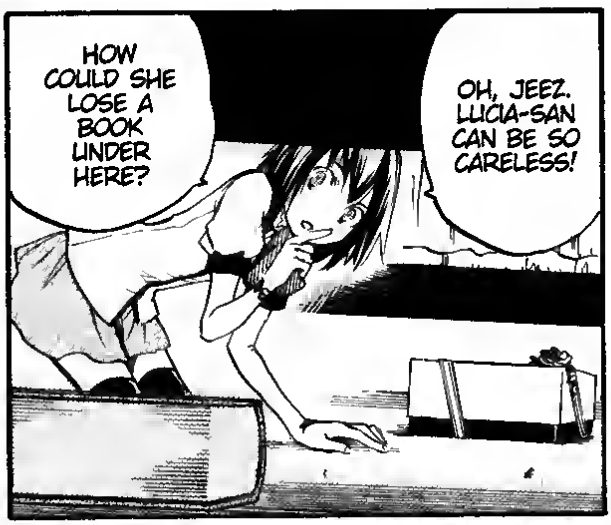
?
TIME FOR PRESENTS!
OH, LET ME GET MINE!
RICH'S

HUH...?


?

UNNH
THIS SURE WAS A GREAT HIDING PLACE...
SHE NEVER EVEN NOTICED IT WAS HERE.

ALMOST!
POTTI


OH, JEEZ. LUCIA-SAN CAN BE SO CARELESS!
HOW COULD SHE LOSE A BOOK UNDER HERE?

.....?

GOTCHA!
THERE YOU ARE.
POF
POF

WHAT'S THIS...?
?
FWIP
OH...
WAIT. THIS IS...
SHF
Dear Lucia
Happy Birthday!
Yoshiki

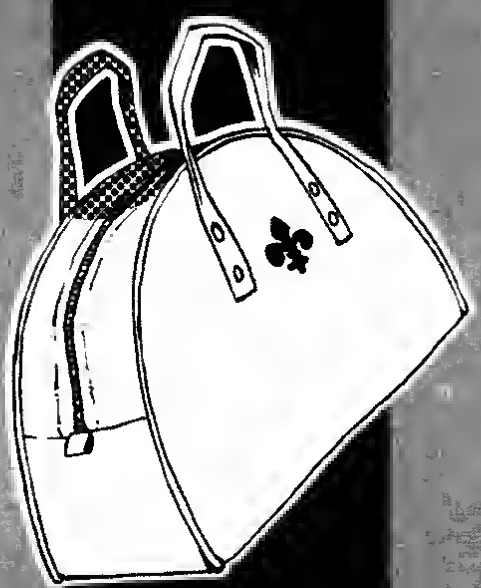
MUMBLE
HUH? WHERE'S SUMIRE?
I'LL GO FIND HER.
?
HUH? AH!
LUCIA, W-WAIT...
KCHK
SUMIRE ?
WHAT'S TAKING YOU SO LONG?
WHAT'RE YOU DOING--?
?
LUCIA-SAN.

...!
CARE TO EXPLAIN...

THIS
TO ME?

Jewelry
and
Clothes

Venus Vangard



EVER SINCE I CAME TO...
AION, THE SELF-PROCLAIMED "TRUE GOD" SITTING UP ON THOSE BOOKS LIKE A THRONE...
HAS BEEN REGULARLY SPOUTING OFF THE SAME CRAP AGAIN AND AGAIN, AND AGAIN.
THIS WORLD WE LIVE IN IS A FALSE ONE CREATED BY A MALICIOUS "GOD."
THESE BODIES WE WEAR...
ARE NOTHING BUT CAGES DESIGNED TO TRAP OUR SOULS WITHIN THIS MATERIAL PRISON.
BUT I KNOW THE TRUTH.
AND I WILL SAVE EVERYONE.

TOTALLY INDEPENDENT FROM MY WILL, ANSWERS WITH THIS GARBAGE.
YES...
AND EVERY TIME, LIKE SOME DUMB, BROKEN RECORD, MY BODY...
AND I SHALL FOLLOW IN YOUR SHADOW EVERY GLORIOUS STEP OF THE WAY.
MY MASTER...
AION-SAMA.
EVERY. SINGLE. FREAKIN'. TIME.

Piece 28
WRITINGS.
DETERMINATION.

WELL NOW...
THAT BY THIS POINT, THOSE TWO HAVE DISCOVERED...
I WOULD THINK...
MY LITTLE "PRESENT," SHALL WE SAY?

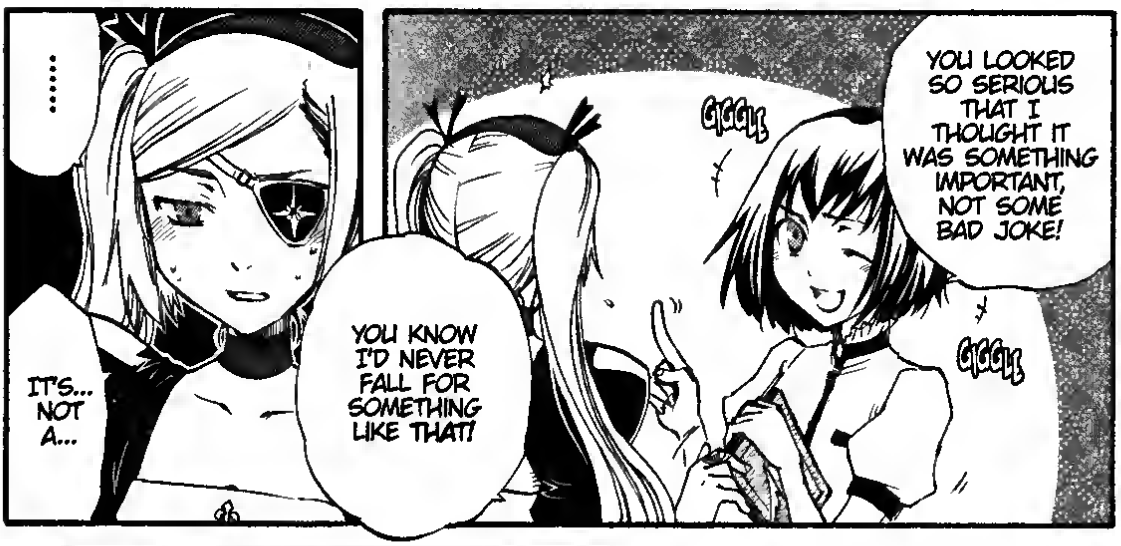
FWOOSH
AND WITHIN IT, THE INVITATION...
TO BEGIN THE NEXT STAGE.
GRIN
.....
THE TIME HAS FINALLY COME.
.....
PHOO

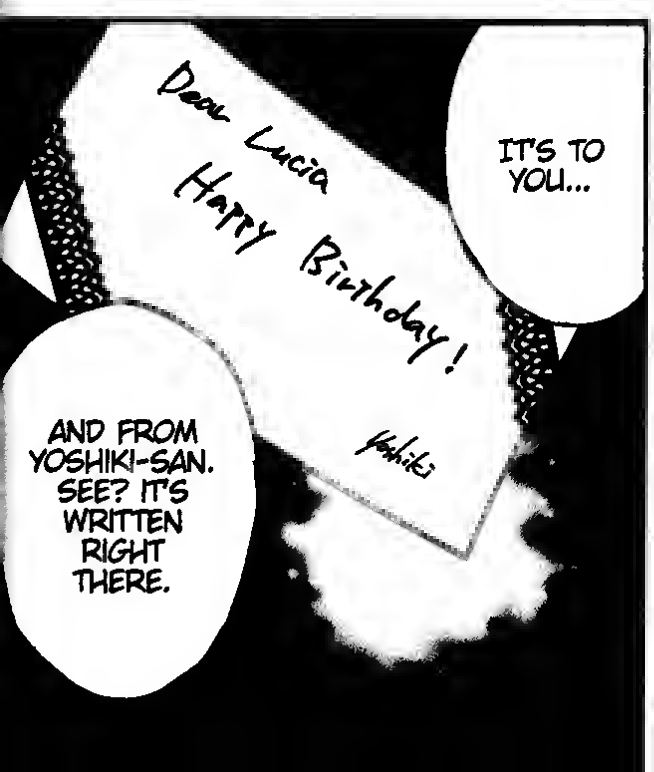
"HAPPY BIRTHDAY"...
"LUCIA-SAN."

I WENT TO THAT PARK.
THREE DAYS AGO...
.....
"YOSHIKI-SAN" WAS THERE.
!
I WAS LURED THERE BY SOME SMALL FRY VIRUS THAT WAS ACTING WEIRD.
I WASN'T INTENDING TO GO THERE.
SUMIRE, LISTEN TO ME!
WHAT?! WHY?! HOW COME YOU GET TO SEE HIM, WHEN I--
SUMIRE, LET ME FINISH.
ARE YOU SAYING YOSHIKI-SAN DID THAT?! HE'D NEVER--
GRAB
LURED...?
?

YOUR "YOSHIKI-SAN"...
IS OUR ENEMY, AION.

OH, LUCIA-SAN, I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU!
HA HA HA!
HA...


.....
IT'S... NOT A...
YOU KNOW I'D NEVER FALL FOR SOMETHING LIKE THAT!
GIGGLE
GIGGLE
YOU LOOKED SO SERIOUS THAT I THOUGHT IT WAS SOMETHING IMPORTANT, NOT SOME BAD JOKE!


Dear Lucia
Happy Birthday!
Yoshiki
IT'S TO YOU...
AND FROM YOSHIKI-SAN. SEE? IT'S WRITTEN RIGHT THERE.

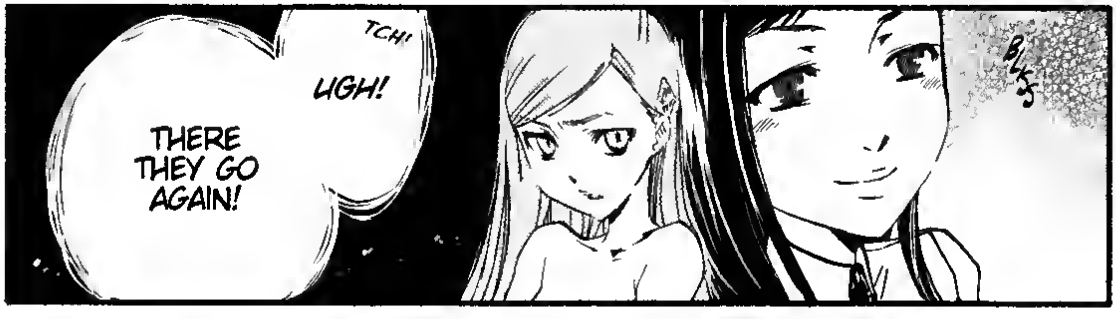
OH, COME ON! IT HAS TO BE.
HERE, SEE? IF THAT'S TRUE, THEN WHAT IS THIS?

SO WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?
MAYBE YOU AND YOSHIKI-SAN...
DECIDED TO PULL A PRANK ON ME?
NO! NEVER!!
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT CARD WAS THERE!!
THAT BASTARD! HE DID THIS ON PURPOSE!
WHY DID HE ALWAYS SMILE SO...
WHY WAS HE ALWAYS SO KIND TO ME...?
RGH ...!
THEN WHAT DID HAPPEN?! IT CAN'T BE WHAT YOU SAID!

!
I'M SORRY ...
SUMIRE ...
I NEED SOME TIME ALONE.
I THINK...

BAM
WHAT TOOK SO LONG, SUMIRE?
SUMIRE ...?
STAFF ONLY
A-HA! THERE SHE IS!
HUH?

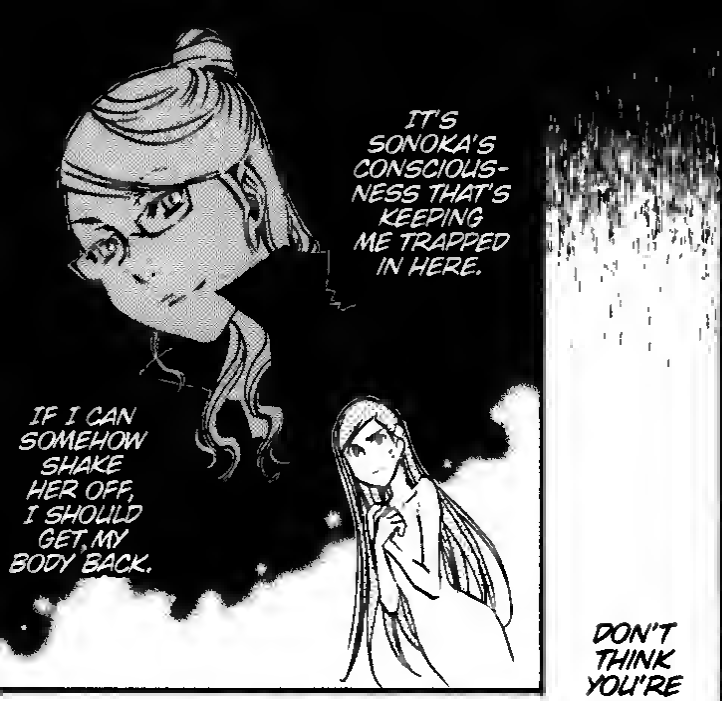
SOON. VERY SOON, THE GATE AND THE KEY WILL AWAKEN.
THEN EVERY-THING WILL BEGIN...
AND FINALLY, WE WILL BE ABLE TO ESCAPE THIS PRISON.

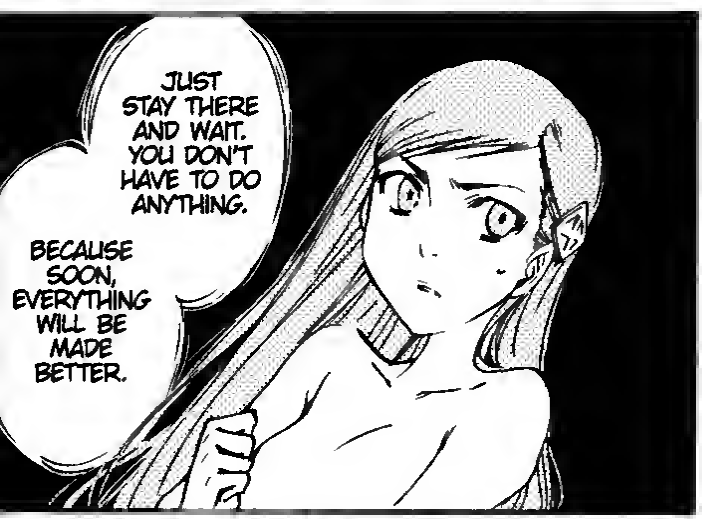

TCH!
UGH!
THERE THEY GO AGAIN!
BLK

HE LOOKED SO WEAK AND PITIFUL.
THE FIRST TIME I SAW HIM...

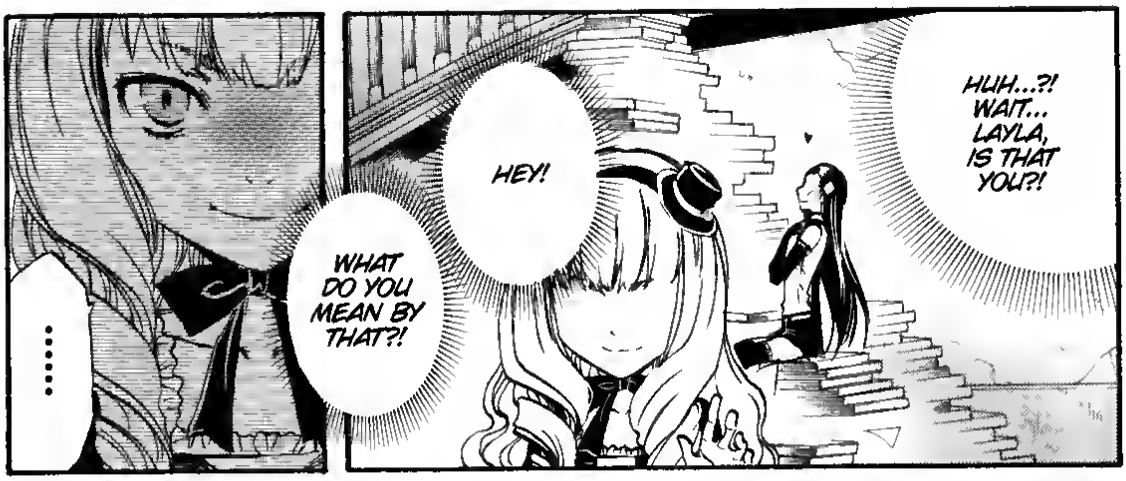
NEVER WOULD'VE EXPECTED THIS GUY TO BE BEHIND IT ALL.
STILL...

GAWD... THAT THOUGHT'S SO SICKENING, IT MAKES ME WANT TO PUKE!
SO EVERYTHING'S GOING ACCORDING TO YOUR "GRAND PLAN," HUH?
EXCEPT FOR SONOKA AND LAYLA...
HE HAD EVERYONE TOTALLY FOOLED.
THOSE TWO GIRLS... ME...
EVERYBODY...
YOU NEVER CARED ABOUT ME, DID YOU? EVER SINCE THE DAY YOU SAVED MY LIFE...
I WAS JUST SOME STUPID PUPPET DANCING ON YOUR STRINGS.
HEY!! I SAID I'M FEELING PHYSICALLY ILL IN HERE!!
STOP USING MY FACE TO OGLE THAT CREEP LIKE SOME LOVE-STRUCK GROUPIE, SONOKA!!

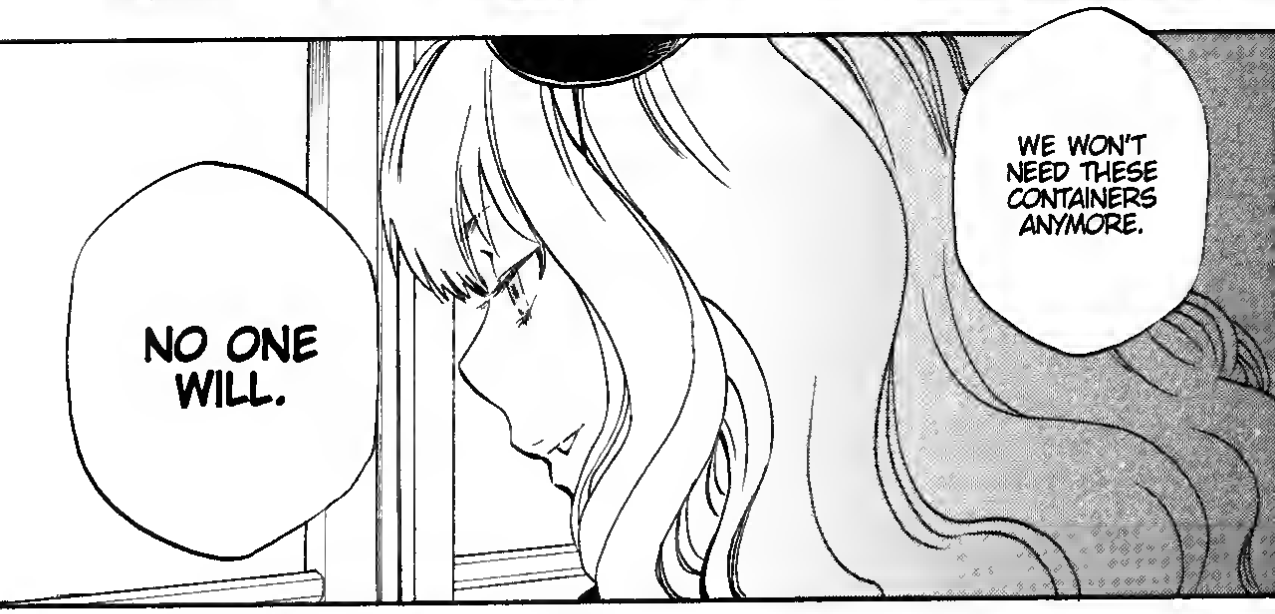


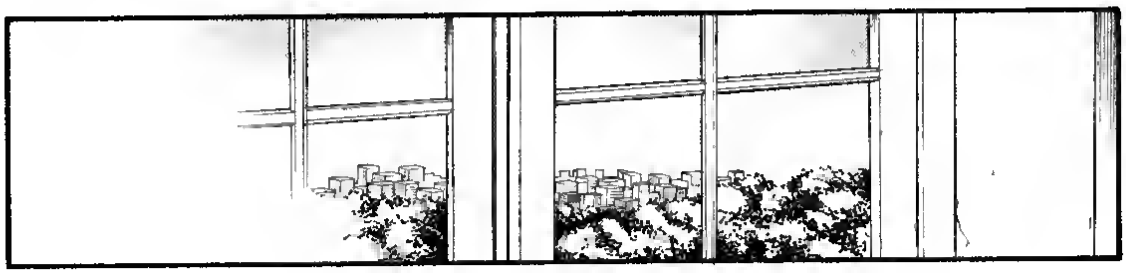


DON'T THINK YOU'RE JUST GOING TO GET AWAY WITH THIS!


HUH...?! WAIT... LAYLA, IS THAT YOU?!
HEY!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?!
.....

MUMBLE
SOON...


WE WON'T NEED THESE CONTAINERS ANYMORE.
NO ONE WILL.



HUH? SUMIRE?!
OH, UM, YEAH...
WE, UH, DECIDED TO POSTPONE THE PARTY UNTIL LATER.
REALLY?
EHEH
SORRY TO DROP BY WITHOUT CALLING.
THAT'S OKAY. BUT...
DIDN'T YOU SAY TODAY WAS LUCIA-SAN'S BIRTHDAY?

UH... OKAY.
ANYWAY, WE'VE GOT TODAY OFF, SO WHY DON'T WE HANG OUT?
WE'VE GOT SNACKS AND EVERYTHING!
SOUNDS GOOD!
YOU'RE ALWAYS SO NICE TO ME.
THANKS.
SAY WHA?
WHAT BROUGHT THAT ON?
SUMIRE, YOU'RE ACTING WEIRD...
IT'S KINDA FREAKY.
R-REALLY?
I WAS JUST SAYING WHAT I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT!
?

NENE'S HOUSE
NO.
I WAS JUST IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD.
"JUST IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD"...?
WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF A HOUSING DEVELOPMENT...
WHOA!
WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE? IS SOMETHING WRONG?!
SUMIRE-CHAN?!
OH... OKAY, THEN.
I DON'T RECALL RAISING YOU TO BE SUCH A PERV.
RIKU.
NEECHAN, C-CAN I COME TOO...?
BTHMP BTHMP
BTHMP BTHMP
CHANG
CRASH
BOOM
PERV
GOOOOONG
変
TOTAL
態
PERV
UM...
THEN WE'LL WALK TO SCHOOL TOGETHER IN THE MORNING.
WHY DON'T YOU STAY FOR THE NIGHT?
TUG
MAMA!
WE HAVE A GUEST FOR DINNER!
ALL RIGHT DEAR
HUH?! NENE-CHAN...!

USUALLY, NENE-CHAN CAN BE PRETTY NOSY...
BUT TODAY, SHE DIDN'T ASK ME ANYTHING.
NENE-CHAN...
THANK YOU.
TP TP TP TP

BLINK
AH!
DEAR NEME-CHAN,
THANKS FOR EVERYTHING I'M GOING TO GO A LITTLE EARLY PLEASE SAY THANKS TO RIKU-KUN FOR ME
-SUMIRE
SHE'S ALREADY GONE...
THOUGHT SO...
SIGH
TOO FAR AWAY FROM US.
YOU HEAR ME, SUMIRE-CHAN...?
JUST DON'T GO...

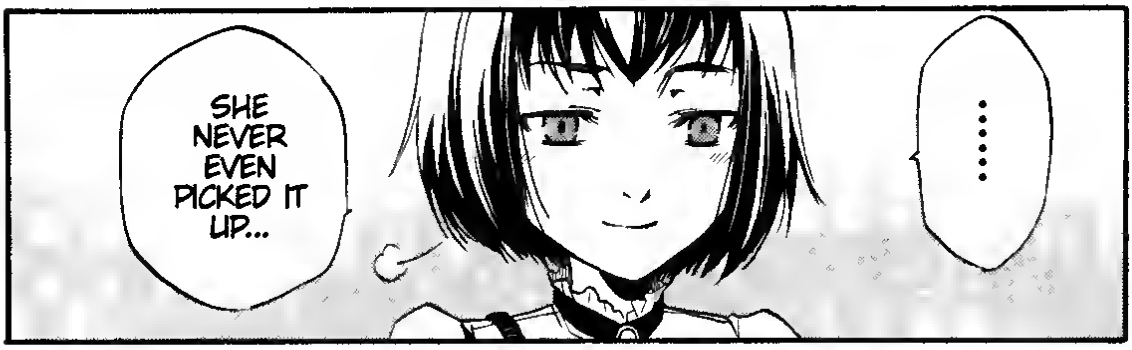
TAKAHANA
HM?! SUMIRE!
WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE? YOU DIDN'T EVEN CALL!
I JUST REALLY WANTED TO COME AND SEE YOU ALL OF A SUDDEN.
EHEH...
SORRY.
?
THAT'S SO SWEET! HOW ABOUT SOME BREAK-FAST?
THAT'S OKAY. I'M ON MY WAY TO A FRIEND'S PLACE...
BYE!
SAY 'HI' TO DAD FOR ME.
KCHK
HUH?
SUMIRE, WAIT...
OH DEAR.
HMM...?
?

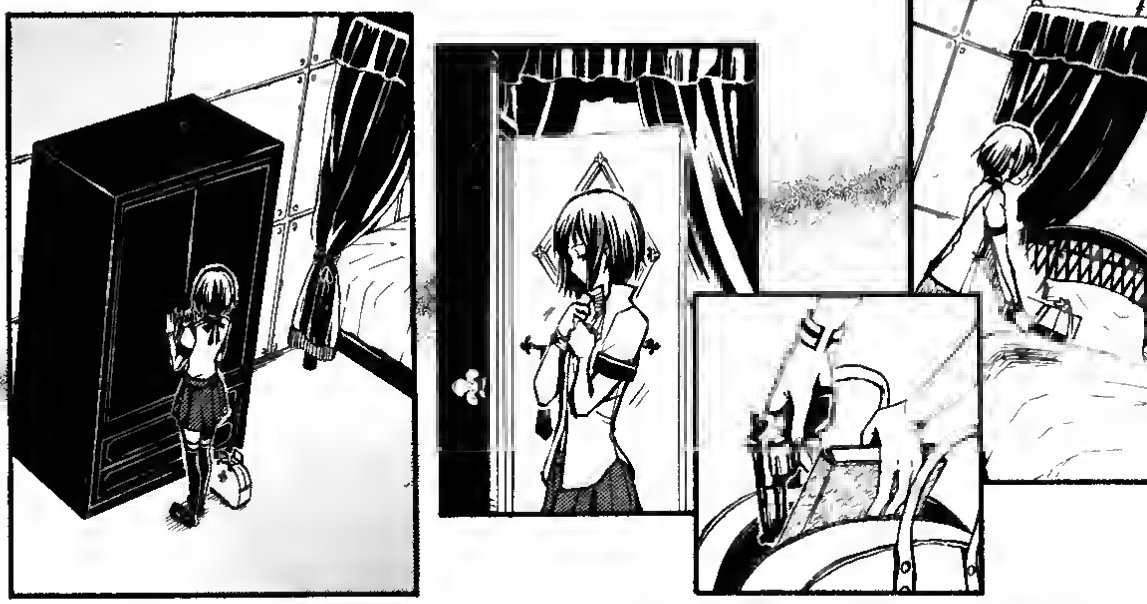
WAIT A MOMENT.
SHOULDN'T SHE BE AT SCHOOL...?
.....
PLOP
I'M SURE IT'LL BE OKAY.
WELL, SHE IS A RESPONSIBLE CHILD.
SUMIRE-KUN NEVER CAME BACK LAST NIGHT.
WHERE COULD SHE HAVE GONE?
SHE'S NOT ANSWERING HER CELL PHONE AT ALL!
SO...
THIS IS ALL MY FAULT.
BUT...
RRR
YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT! IT'S THAT "YOSHIKI" GUY'S FAULT!
OR "AION," OR WHATEVER HE'S CALLING HIMSELF NOW!
ENOUGH, LUCIA.
THIS IS NOT YOUR FAULT.

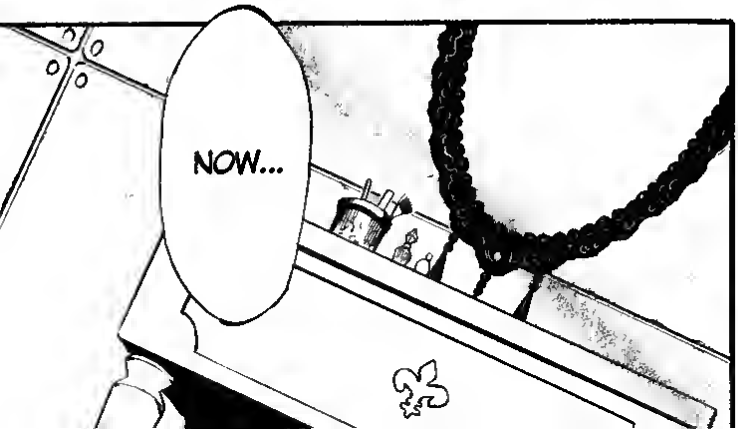
RRRRRR
?
THAT IS THE SHOP'S PHONE...
HOW UNUSUAL
I WILL ANSWER IT.
!
SUMIRE-KUN?!
IS THAT YOU?!
!
NAHASHI! WHERE IS SHE?
KLAK
SUMIRE ...?!
STAY RIGHT THERE. WE WILL COME FOR YOU SHORTLY.
WE WERE WORRIED ABOUT YOU! WHERE ARE YOU NOW?
I SEE...
IT SEEMS SHE IS ON THE OUT-SKIRTS OF TOWN.
SHE'S WAITING FOR US TO COME PICK HER UP.
THE OUT-SKIRTS?! WHAT'S SHE DOING ALL THE WAY...?
WHATEVER. LET'S GET GOING ALREADY!
I'M COMING TOO!!

SHF
BRMMMM
VRRRR
VRRRR
PSHHHH
Venus Vanguard
EVERY-ONE...
I'M SORRY.

SLAM


SHE NEVER EVEN PICKED IT UP...
.....




NOW...

LUCIA-SAN...
YOU'LL UNDERSTAND, RIGHT?

PSHHHH

FWIP

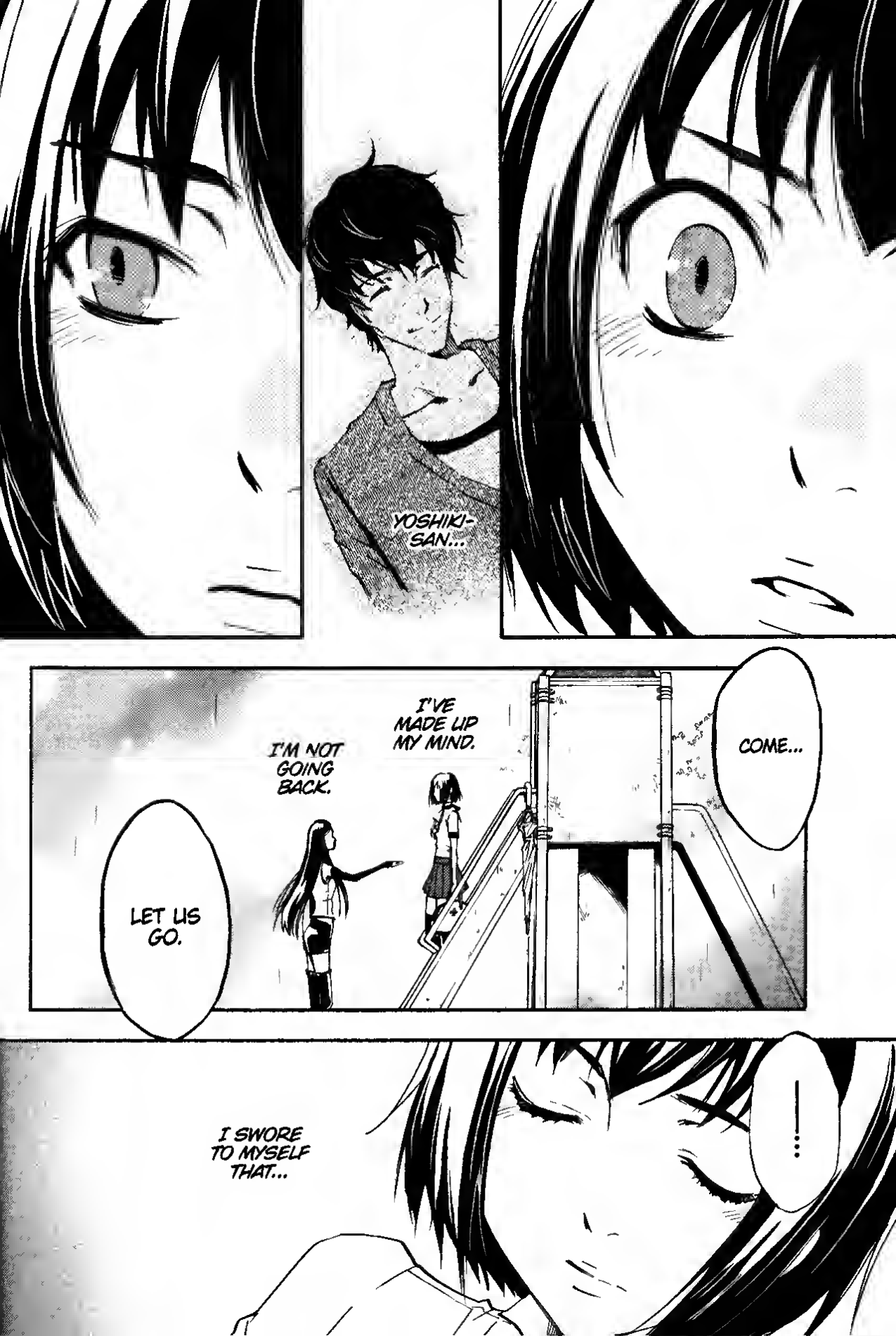
SITTING HERE...
READING LIKE THIS...
IT ALMOST FEELS LIKE I COULD GO BACK.
LIKE I COULD WIND BACK TIME TO THOSE WONDERFUL DAYS.
FP...

BMP
RUB
BUT...
IF I'M STUCK IN THE PAST...
I WON'T BE ABLE TO MOVE ON WITH MY LIFE.

I DON'T WANT THAT.
I'VE MADE UP MY MIND.
HAH!
PUSH
PUSH

RUKA ...?!
HEE HEE...
NO, IT'S OKAY.
I AM NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM. I'M NOT THE SHORT-TEMPERED, HOT-HEADED RUKA YOU KNEW...
I AM SONOKA.
HEE HEE.
WHA ...?
HAS REACHED THE EARS OF THE "TRUE GOD."
IT SEEMS YOUR PRAYER...

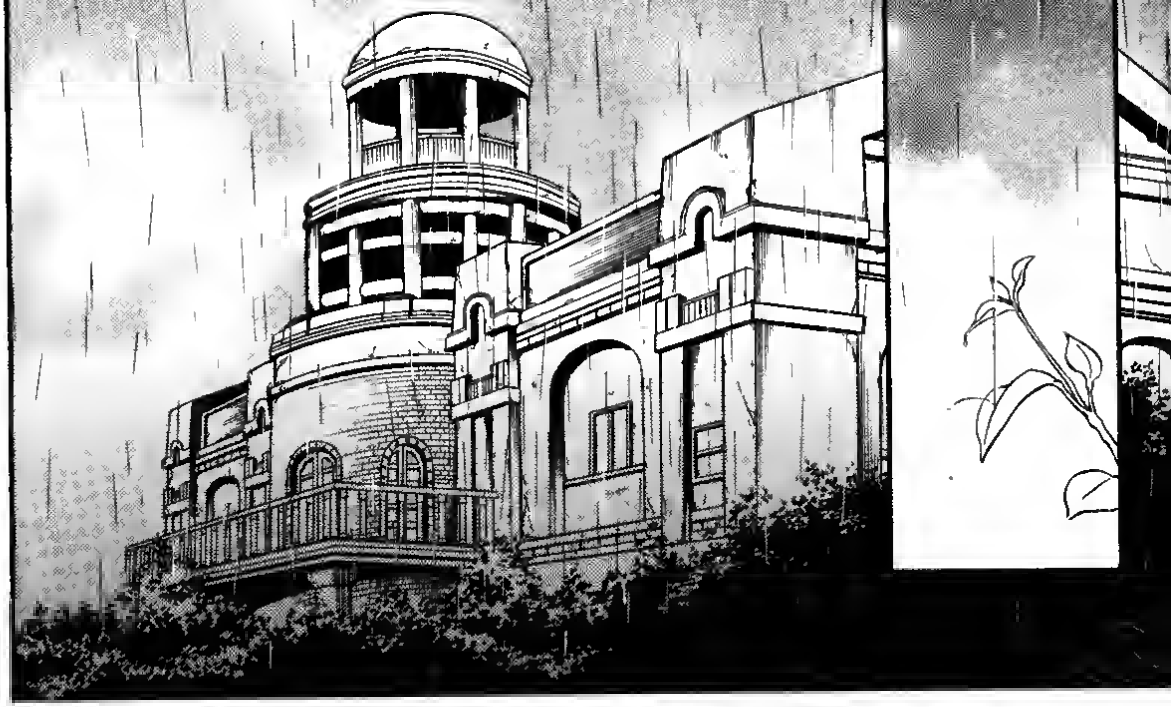
THE "TRUE GOD"...
MY MASTER, AION-SAMA...
DESIRES TO MEET YOU...
IMMEDI-ATELY.
BTHMP


YOSHIKI-SAN...
COME...
I'VE MADE UP MY MIND.
I'M NOT GOING BACK.
LET US GO.
I SWORE TO MYSELF THAT...
!...

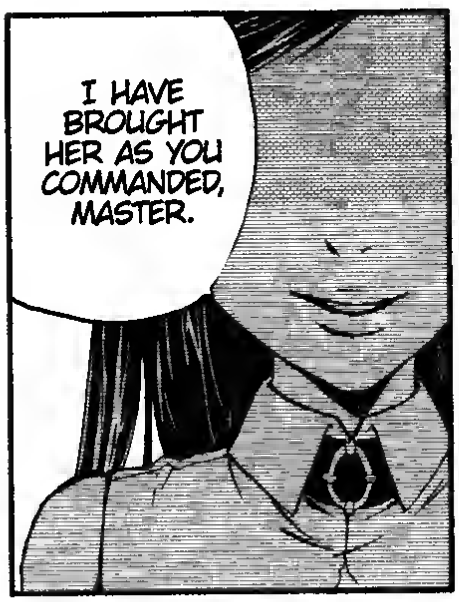
I WOULD NEVER AGAIN TURN AWAY FROM THE TRUTH.
NO MATTER HOW CRUEL AND HARSH IT MAY BE...
ALL RIGHT...
TAKE ME TO HIM.

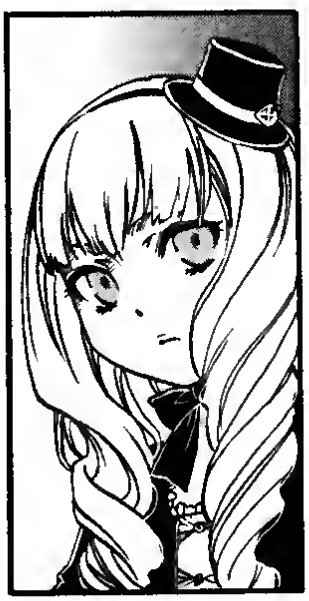
Jewelry
and
Clothes

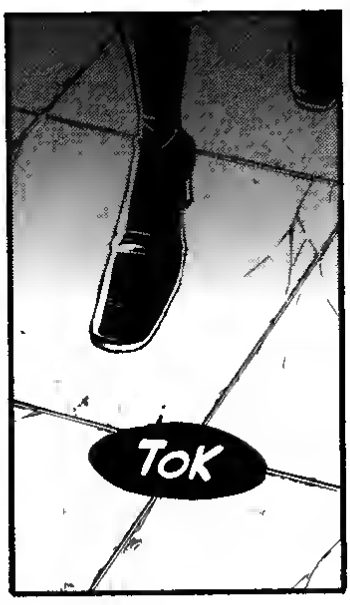
Venus Vangard

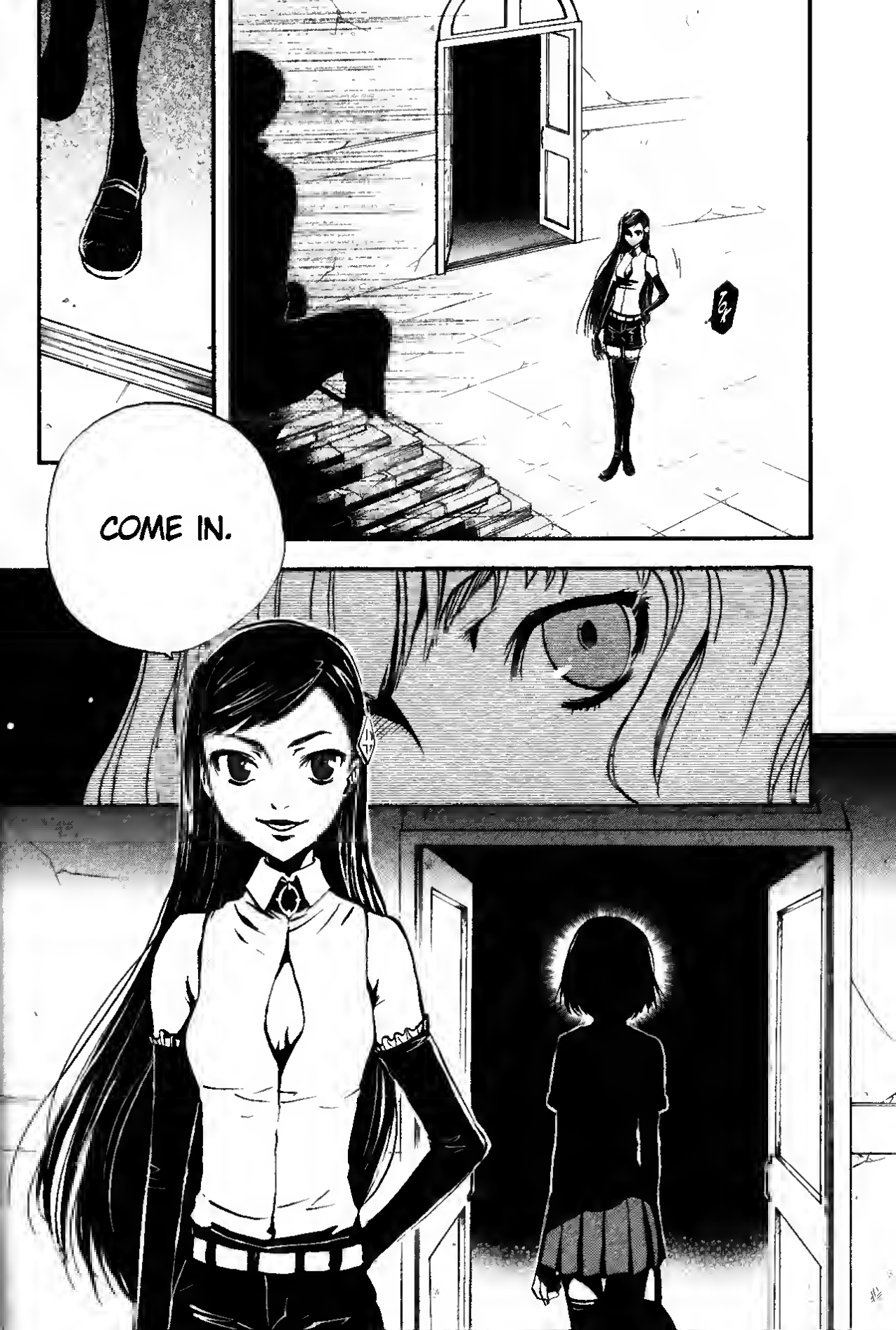


TOK

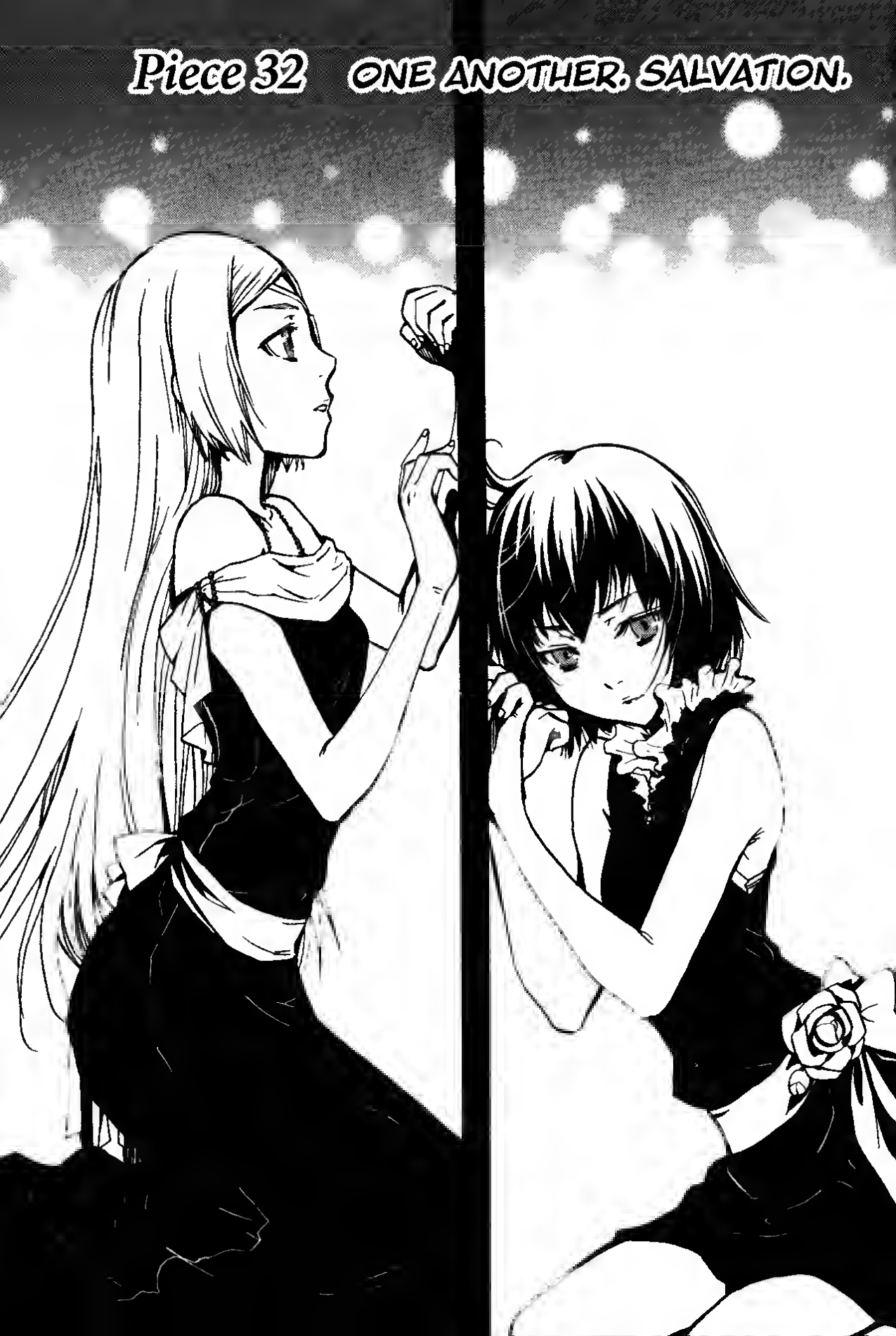

I HAVE BROUGHT HER AS YOU COMMANDED, MASTER.




TOK


COME IN.

Piece 32 ONE ANOTHER. SALVATION.



FWISH
PMP
SHF
AH ...!!
I'M SO GLAD...

I WAS WORRIED YOU MIGHT NOT COME...
SUMIRE-CHAN.
YO...
HIS SMILE...
YOSHIKI...
YOSHIKI-SAN...?
IT'S THE SAME ONE AS ALWAYS.

YOSHIKI-SAN!
IT REALLY IS YOU, RIGHT? I'M NOT DREAMING...
HA HA HA...
OF COURSE! I'M THE SAME ME THAT YOU ALWAYS KNEW.
BUT...
I DID NOT CALL YOU HERE...
AS "YOSHIKI."
THEN...
Y-YOU...
REALLY ARE...
SKFF
.....
PLOP

"AION"...
AREN'T YOU?
YOU ALREADY KNEW THAT, DEEP DOWN.
THAT'S WHY YOU CAME HERE, IS IT NOT?

EHEH...
EHEH HEH HEH...
SO SHE WASN'T LYING.
EVERYTHING LUCIA-SAN SAID...
IT WAS ALL TRUE.
A PART OF ME... A BIG PART OF ME...
KEPT WISHING IT WAS JUST SOME JOKE.
EVERY-THING I KNEW...
EVERYONE I TRUSTED...
NO...
IT FEELS LIKE MY WHOLE WORLD JUST CRUMBLED OUT FROM BENEATH ME.

SO...
NH...
GRIN
I GUESS THIS MEANS ...
YOU NO LONGER HAVE ANY FAITH IN ME?
!
.....
NO, THAT'S NOT IT.
NOT AT ALL.
I JUST REALIZED THAT IN TRUSTING ONE PERSON...
I BEGAN TO DOUBT ANOTHER.
I DID THAT TO YOU...
AND TO LUCIA-SAN.
IT'S NOT YOU...
I'VE LOST FAITH IN MYSELF.

I'VE PROMISED MYSELF...
I ALWAYS FIND NEW WAYS TO DOUBT THEM.
SO I'VE MADE UP MY MIND!!
NO MATTER HOW MUCH I WANT TO TRUST THE PEOPLE I LOVE...
I'M GOING TO LOOK STRAIGHT AT IT AND ACCEPT IT...
AND TRUST THE PEOPLE I LOVE RIGHT THROUGH TO THE VERY END.
NO MATTER HOW HORRIBLE OR PAINFUL THE TRUTH...
SUMIRE-CHAN...
YOU TRULY ARE...
HMPH!
.....
WE CAN FIND SOME WAY TO--
THAT WAY I'M SURE, IF WE REALLY TRY...

?!
A KIND-HEARTED PERSON.
SWAP
KYAA!
FWOOOOOOO
!!
?!
SHF
I AM NOT YOUR ENEMY. I DON'T WANT TO FIGHT YOU.
BUT IT SEEMS YOU HAVE THE WRONG IMPRESSION.
WHAT THE HECK--?!

WHAT I WANT...

!!!
BTHMP
IS TO SAVE YOU.
WHAT ...?
STAGGR
THAT SWEET SCENT... IT'S...
WE'RE NOT ENEMIES ...

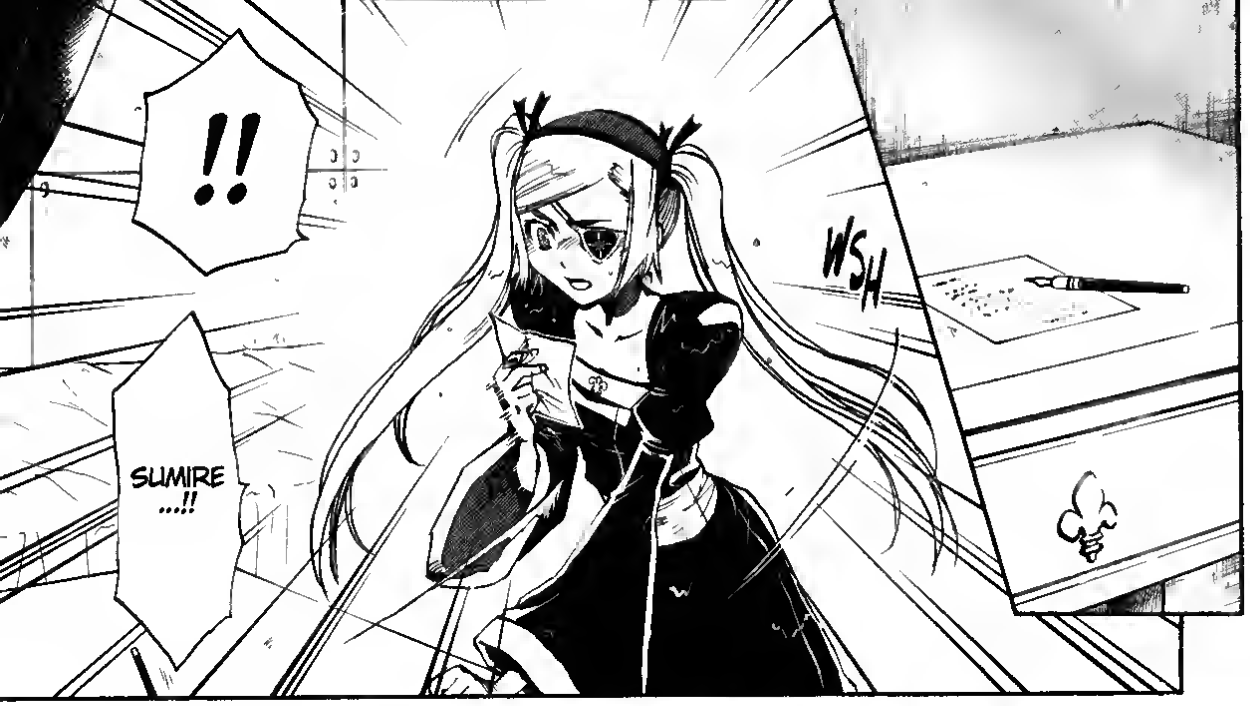
WE SHOULD BE WORKING TOGETHER.
BECAUSE, LIKE YOU...
I'M TRYING TO SAVE EVERYONE FROM THE DARKNESS.
TRYING TO...
SAVE...?

YOU UNDER-STAND THIS...
RIGHT, SUMIRÉ-CHAN...?
DAMN IT!!
WHAM

LUCIA...
STMP
STMP
STMP
BTAM
I CAN'T BELIEVE SHE LIED TO US LIKE THAT!!
WHAT THE HELL HAS GOTTEN INTO HER?!
WHY...
LUCIA! YOU SHOULD NOT SAY THINGS LIKE THAT!
WSH
SLAM
SERIOUSLY! WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT LITTLE IDIOT THINKING?!

SUMIRE?
WHY WON'T YOU COME BACK HOME...
I AM CERTAIN LUCIA. SUMIRE-KUN HAS HER REASONS.
HOWEVER, AS WE CANNOT CONTACT HER AT ALL, THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO.
AT THE MOMENT, IT IS BEST THAT WE CALM DOWN...
GRAB
CALM DOWN?! HOW CAN YOU EXPECT ME TO CALM DOWN?!
SHE'S GONE!
SUMIRE'S GONE, NAHASH!!
HOWEVER, YOU HAVE ALREADY SPENT HOURS OUT IN THE RAIN, SEARCHING FOR HER.
YOU ARE CHILLED TO THE BONE.
RIGHT NOW, WHAT YOU NEED IS A WARM SHOWER AND A CHANGE OF CLOTHING.
THEN WE SHALL ALL GATHER TOGETHER AND DISCUSS WHAT TO DO NEXT.
YOU ARE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO FEELS AS YOU DO RIGHT NOW.
NG ...!
GRAB

ALL RIGHT...
SLAM
BRR...
.....
MY HANDS ...
THEY'RE ALMOST FROZEN.
BUT SUMIRE'S HANDS...
WERE ALWAYS SO WARM.
I'LL NEVER LEAVE YOUR SIDE, LUCIA-SAN!
GRAB
!


!!
WSH
SUMIRE ....!!

DEAR LUCIA-SAN,

FIRST, I'M SORRY.
WHAT I SAID TO YOU MUST HAVE HURT YOU VERY MUCH.

IT'S BEEN ALMOST ONE YEAR SINCE WE MET. THE TIME WENT BY SO QUICKLY.
Vanguard
IN THE BEGINNING, I WAS AFRAID OF HAVING TO FIGHT ALL THE TIME. BUT IT WAS ALSO A LOT OF FUN TO HANG OUT WITH EVERYONE.
THANKS TO YOU, I'VE MET AND MADE SO MANY NEW FRIENDS.
YOU, LUCIA-SAN. NAHASHI-SAN. LOLA-CHAN.
AND YOSHIKI-SAN.
ALL OF YOU ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO ME, AND I CARE ABOUT YOU ALL A WHOLE LOT.

SO THAT'S WHY I'M GOING TO GO AND SEE IF I CAN FIND A WAY TO SAVE YOU ALL.
I KNOW IT'S SELFISH OF ME, BUT PLEASE FORGIVE ME JUST THIS ONCE.
—SUMIRE
P.S. I STILL THINK YOU SHOULD QUIT SMOKING.
HOW COULD YOU?!
DAMN RIGHT, YOU'RE BEING SELFISH!!
AND IF YOU THINK I'LL EVER FORGIVE YOU FOR IT, YOU'VE GOT ANOTHER THING COMING!
.....
WHA ...?

THIS WHOLE TIME, I'VE BEEN FIGHTING FOR...
.....
WHAT HAPPENS TO ME?
WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?!
WITHOUT YOU HERE...
FWIP

LET'S ALL GO ON A PICNIC TOGETHER SOMETIME!
.....
THAT'S RIGHT...
A PICNIC.
YOU PROMISED WE'D ALL GO TOGETHER, REMEMBER?

HEY, SUMIRE...?
YOU'RE COMING BACK SOON, RIGHT?
SUMIRE...
SUMIREEEEEE!!!
WAAAAAH AAAAHH!

LAYLA...
BTHMD
KIIIIIIN
NH?!
THE...
THE VISION LAYLA JUST SHOWED ME...!
OH... MY GOD...
LOLA?!
.....!!

AHH...

POOR... POOR LUCIA-SAN...
LUCIA-SAN...
WHISPER
STAGGER
I...
I MUST...
I...
THE "KEY"...
HAS AWAKENED.

COME.
LET US GO AND SAVE THE "GATE."
SMILE
YES...
MY MASTER ...!
SHIVER

TIME GOES BY SO QUICKLY.
THE END OF THE RAINY SEASON'S HERE ALREADY...
SUMIRE.
Y'KNOW...
YOU DIDN'T REALLY NEED TO APOLOGIZE TO ME.
I'M THE ONE WHO SHOULD BE SAYING "SORRY" TO YOU.
I PRETTY MUCH STRONG-ARMED YOU INTO THIS WHOLE MESS IN THE FIRST PLACE...
BUT I WAS NEVER ABLE TO DO ANYTHING TO HELP YOU OUT.
FWISH

REAL JERK, AREN'T I?
I ONLY REALLY CARED ABOUT YOUR POWERS AT FIRST.
BUT THEN YOU MOVED INTO THE SHOP...
AND BROUGHT SPRING WITH YOU INTO MY LITTLE CAVE.
HNH. I SAID I'D PROTECT YOU...
BUT YOU WERE PROTECTING ME.
JEEZ...

THAT THE WHOLE REASON WAS TO GET REVENGE ON THAT BASTARD LUCIF.
TOS
AND HERE I KEPT TELLING MYSELF...
BOMF
LOOKS LIKE I WAS WRONG.
THIS IS KINDA EMBAR-RASS-ING...
BUT I'VE GOT TO ADMIT IT.

WHAT I TRULY WANT ISN'T REVENGE.
IT'S THE CHANCE TO BE WITH YOU, NAHASHI, LOLA... EVERYONE...
MY OWN, WARM, ETERNAL "SPRING."
THAT...

IS WHY I'M GOING TO FIGHT.
BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO BE WITHOUT YOU.
MUMBLE
--SAN...
MUMBLE
I'M GOING TO STOP GIVING UP ON THE PEOPLE AND THINGS IMPORTANT TO ME.
JUST LIKE YOU DID...
GET READY.
SUMIRE ...
MUMBLE
PLEASE WAIT JUST A LITTLE WHILE LONGER.
MUMBLE
LUCIA-SAN...

I
PROMISE...

CONCLUDED IN VOLUME 8!!

POSTSCRIPT

HELLO, EVERYONE! SUZUMI HERE. THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING TO PICK UP *VENUS VERSUS VIRUS VOLUME 7!*

SO FOR THIS VOLUME, WE HAVE OUR FIRST GUY ON THE COVER! I COULDN'T HELP MYSELF. DRAWING 'DARK YOSHIKI-SAN' WAS JUST TOO MUCH FUN... I WAS PRETTY NERVOUS WHEN I ASKED MY SUPERVISOR IF IT WAS REALLY OKAY FOR ME TO DRAW A GUY ON THE COVER, NOT A GIRL. HIS RESPONSE: "AS LONG AS IT'S ATTRACTIVE, IT'S COOL. KNOCK YOURSELF OUT." SO I GOT PERMISSION. :-) WHEN I SHOWED HIM THE FINISHED PICTURE, HE KINDA SNICKERED AT YOSHIKI-SAN SHOWING OFF HIS BELLY BUTTON, BUT I'M NOT GOING TO WORRY ABOUT THAT. DRAWING HIM WAS TONS OF FUN, SO I'M SATISFIED!

IT SEEMS LIKE EVERY TIME I GET DONE WITH A TANKOUBON VOLUME, I ALWAYS THINK, "WHOA, VOLUME # ALREADY? TIME SURE FLIES!!" BUT THIS TIME, *V.V.V.* IS FINALLY GETTING READY TO WRAP UP IN THE NEXT VOLUME. I'D BE HONORED IF YOU WOULD STAY WITH LUCIA AND SUMIRE ALL THE WAY TO THE END. SEE YOU ALL IN THE NEXT VOLUME!!

2008. 3 鈴見敦

ATSUSHI SUZUMI